

# BELLY OF THE BEAST

**BEN DUTTER**

# BELLY OF THE BEAST

— ROLEPLAYING GAME —

Ben Dutter

AN ETHOS ENGINE RPG





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# I: Introduction

**Belly of the Beast** is a grim tabletop roleplaying game about brutal, selfish scavengers surviving in the gut of a titanic, parasitic, world-eating monster.

Hundreds of years ago, a massive rock fell from the sky, crushing kingdoms and continents beneath it. Eventually, life in the realms returned to a state of normalcy, and the many clans continued their incessant struggle for power.

Three generations past, the skyrock—said to possess foul energies and discordant vibrations—erupted in a disgusting ball of effluence and viscera, revealing the creature that dwelt within it, the Swallower of Worlds, the Insatiable God, the Devourer, or simply: the *Beast*.

Incalculably large, the Beast unfurled its great girth upon the land, consuming thousands of leagues of soil, stone, and forest. One by one, the mighty strongholds and great armies of the age fell against its inexorable consumption.

And yet when legions, empires, and cities are swallowed whole, not all is lost. A rare few survive the Devouring, and test their mettle living in the *belly of the Beast*.

You are one of these exemplars of grit and greed: a scavenger. Hundreds of great civilizations have been consumed, but their wares, artifacts, and materials are ripe for the taking deep within the recesses of your new home's guts.

Plenty are brave, desperate, foolish, or insane enough to try to make a living in this horrid place—but few survive, and even fewer thrive.

# HOW TO PLAY

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**Belly of the Beast** is a roleplaying game—that means that you and at least one other friend take on the roles of fictional characters, living, fighting, killing, and scavenging within the stomach of this Hungry God.



You'll discuss what your characters do and say, how they act and what they look like, telling a story together—all guided by these rules and the roll of the dice.

Most of your group's players will each take on the role of one character—a **scavenger**—who's skilled enough to make repeat trips away from the few "safe" strongholds and into the great wastes. You will work together, form a **company**, and go on scavenging **pulls** together, looking for valuable commodities and necessities of life, while pursuing the dream of discovering some swallowed treasure or digested hoard.

One player will take on the role of the **Game Master (GM)**, who will describe the environment, control all of the **non-player characters (NPCs)**—including the Belly's many antagonists—make judgments about how difficult and dangerous certain actions are, and ultimately illustrate the outcomes of those actions.

It's best to play with four to five players total, with all but one playing characters, and one acting as GM. However, the game can handle as few as two players or upwards of seven or eight.

In the simplest terms, as a player you'll say what you want your character to do and roll some dice, then the GM will determine whether your character succeeds or fails.

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## HOW TO PLAY RECAP

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**Belly of the Beast** is a collaborative storytelling game.

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One player takes on the role of the Game Master (GM).

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Each other player takes on the role of a scavenger living in the Evergut.

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# GAMEPLAY STYLE

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**Belly of the Beast** focuses on stories about a ragtag group of scavengers doing everything they can not only to survive, but to thrive in this stinking cesspit of a monster's gut.

The characters are tough, cruel, greedy bastards that care mainly about themselves and the very few people to whom they might feel a hint of loyalty. Driven by instinct and need, only the cunning and the grim can make it as scavengers.

Personal tales of struggle, triumph, betrayal, greed, and the constant and incessant need for supplies in the face of danger fit well with **Belly of the Beast**.

The longer scavengers live and the bigger their hauls, the better they'll get at their job. Over time, your characters will improve and command more respect, authority, and jealousy.

**Belly of the Beast's** gameplay, driven by its rules, often follows this cycle: encounter a problem or run out of stuff, look for the stuff that'll solve the problem, get the stuff, and bring the stuff back in order to fix the issue. Repeat until dead.

# WHAT YOU NEED

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All you need to play **Belly of the Beast** is one other player, some paper, pencils, these rules, and regular six-sided dice. You really only need one die, but a fistful for each player is ideal.

Ideally, you'll have a group of friends who all buy into the game's premise and will play with you. If possible, ask each player to read these rules (or at least the Quick Start located in the back) and print out a character sheet.

Once you've got a group of players ready and willing to get started, you'll help each other determine who's going to be the **GM**, figure out your **game concept**, and think about your individual characters.



# DICE

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**Belly of the Beast** only uses regular six-sided dice, just called **dice** or **D**. Sometimes, you'll roll more than one die. This is abbreviated as **xD**, where x is the number of dice being rolled. So **3D** would be rolling three dice.

At times, you'll gain bonus dice, which add to your roll. This is abbreviated as **+xD**. So if you were rolling 3D and got a +1D bonus, you'd roll a total of four dice (4D).

Whenever you roll in **Belly of the Beast**, there are three types of dice that you can add to your roll: the Base Die, Advantage Dice, and Instinct Dice.

## **Base Die (BD)**

Every time you roll, you add the BD. No exceptions.

## **Advantage Dice (AD)**

AD are added to your roll when your character is acting in a favorable or especially effective way. AD can come from equipment, a clever approach or method, or other external factors.

## Instinct Dice (ID)

ID are accrued in your **Instinct pool** when your character behaves in agreement with their **Instincts**, as well as when they successfully complete a pull (a scavenging mission).

Whenever you roll, you can spend ID from your Instinct pool to add the same number of ID to your roll.

# TONE AND CHARACTERS

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The tone of **Belly of the Beast** is pretty dark, foreboding, and gritty; a quick way to sum it up is *Mad Max* meets *Valhalla Rising*. That's not to say there isn't humor—in fact, many scavengers are pranksters and tell jokes to add levity to their otherwise dour lives. Similarly, people in the Evergut fall in love, get married, have families, and even live relatively satisfying lives.

You'll find lots of inspiration for your story and world in post-apocalyptic and survival stories, but at the end of the day, the characters are tough killers and experts who go where no sane person would go in order to collect a profitable haul.

Ultimately, though, this is your game and you should discuss what kind of tone and themes you're looking to elicit. A game in which half of the players are comedic relief might not sit well with the folks trying to play it straight.

Your characters aren't glorious heroes or epic warriors, but their motivations might be selfless or driven strictly by their natural instincts. **Belly of the Beast** is just as much about exploring your characters—and how far they're willing to go—as it is about fighting over lost relics swallowed by a planet-eating parasite.





# II: The Belly

When the great Devourer left its rocky chrysalis, few believed the hysterical stories from the farmers and wardens and rangers who claimed to have seen the thing gorging up the countryside. In truth, it was unfathomable—a monster the size of a mountain range wriggling its way through mountains and forests? Ridiculous.

Once it became clear that these rumors were true, and not the ramblings of the mad, there wasn't much that could be done. The Beast isn't particularly fast, but it is completely unstoppable. It chewed through mountains like butter, gobbled up forests, and had a taste for the densest and most vibrant locations on the surface—especially cities.

By the time the various states and clans tried to unite as a stalwart force against the Beast's consumption, it was too late. Millions had been swallowed, entire continents' surfaces scraped clean a league deep, kingdoms and nations destroyed by gluttonous, gnashing teeth.

Those that were eaten found that the nightmare didn't end there—the vastness of the Beast's innards was so great that entire settlements managed to hold together and survive, lodging themselves in the soft guts of the creature or atop piles of undigested rock and dirt.

Even animals and plants somehow developed a living ecosystem in the harsh and bilious cavern-like stomach, fleeing to the high ground and terraces formed in its calcifying guts. Eventually, its rate of consumption greatly slowed—and the long and arduous digestive process provided ample opportunity for enterprising and tough scavengers to survive amid the toxic fumes and caustic acid.

Any semblance of a real economy or society has completely disintegrated, and the many once-warring clans and peoples now warily work together in order to keep their few remaining loved ones and possessions safe. Scavengers fill the gaps—providing what others need and are either unable or unwilling to acquire.

It's a tough job, and more die than make a living of it, but somebody's gotta do it, right?

# SWALLOWER OF WORLDS

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Many believe that the Beast is a scourge sent from the gods to consume all life. Some say that it is a god, or even *the* God, and that the realm's sole purpose in existing is to feed the great Devourer.

That no longer matters now, as you live within the creature's vast and dark innards. For half a century scavengers and explorers have been trying to map and catalog the Belly, but few make it far, and such records are exceedingly rare.

Those most informed believe that the Beast is at least a thousand leagues long, and a tenth as wide. Its guts are moist and foul, but dry and hard enough—especially when packed with a fresh mountain or city—to walk and move comfortably upon for able-bodied folk.

The Beast itself generates an enormous amount of heat and refuse, its flesh, blood, and fat giving off a faint glow in certain regions—bizarre plants and alchemical mixtures lighting up entire lakes of saliva in luminescence, veins and cracks in its flesh glowing in a variety of warm colors.

Composed of countless segments, many of which hold pulsing compartments and organs, the Beast's cavernous body collects the hardiest, sturdiest, and least digestible elements in the nooks and crannies of its musculature. These are prime plots for profitable pulls, and are often fought over by the more violent scavenging companies.

If a surface dweller were to be trapped within the Beast, its innards might appear to be an unusually spiraling and massive cave. Much of the "floor" is full of mud and gravel and stone, the "walls" are piled-up refuse and calcified ridges (and occasional fleshy segments), and the "roof" often disappears up into the blackness above. Many of the grotesqueries wouldn't appear dissimilar from clay, mud, or other natural soils and materials to the untrained eye—shrouded in humid mist and diffuse light.

# CULTURE

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Tens of thousands of the Swallowed live and die amid these paltry remnants of society, often just as likely to kill one another as to cooperate. Their future is uncertain.

It is a dark time for humanity, when trust has never been more valuable, but few can be trusted. A time when babies are born, live, grow old, and die without ever seeing the sun. A time when the weak have long since disappeared, and even the strongest are lucky to reach their fourth decade. A time when useful scraps, shreds, and fragments of the Eaten Age are more valuable than all the world's gold or silver.

Despite this difficulty, the tenacity and determination of humanity prevails, and its people live on. Where there were once many dozens of great cultures, empires, and kingdoms strewn across the land, now there are but several pockets of resistance and perseverance.

The people are often nomadic, as necessary, in order to avoid being entombed by the constant onslaught of newly eaten terrain. The oldest and most valuable ruins are the deepest within the Beast, while the freshest and most savory food and resources are closest to its gullet.

The economy has dwindled to a very basic form of barter, often based upon what one has and needs immediately. Small institutions, factions, and organizations have formed to help protect those who are willing to acquire their daily needs, and ensure that they receive a fair portion of barter for their work.



In times of desperation, many subsist off of the Beast's flesh and blood, gouging out its soft tissues when they can. Its effluence has the foulest taste and darkest taint, but those who eat it remain healthy and strong. And yet, feasting upon the Beast's flesh leaves one paranoid, violent, and eventually with a mind rotten and mad.

People do what they can to enjoy life, partaking in what is immediately pleasurable and available. This has created a dichotomy of heedless hedonism and harsh practicality, for any moment may be your last.

The concept of tracking specific lengths of time is foreign to most born in the Belly, although there are a few cycles with relative consistency. The Beast itself goes through stages of dormancy and activity, often sleeping through heavy digestion periods—these are the closest thing to days, and are often referred to as **sleeps**. The term is used both for the Beast's cycles of sleep and wakefulness and for the survivors' night time or quiet time. The longer the Beast is dormant, the less light exists naturally within the Belly, slowly dimming to near darkness.

Longer periods are often measured in **farrows**, or the period of a hog's pregnancy. For an Evergut hog the typical farrow lasts about 120 surface days, so there's roughly three per surface year. The Swallowed generally just measure things in farrows, although due to each passel of hogs being on a different rotation, it is hard to measure outside of your own localized hold. Upon reaching adulthood, for example, one might have lived through fifty farrows.

Faith, mysticism, and the belief in the unseen or supernatural has waned for some and grown more intense for other Swallowed. Some even worship the Devourer, while others pray for salvation, an end to their hellish nightmare. Organized religion is sparse and scattered, with small and isolated churches and shamans doing their best to understand and survive their situation just like the faithless.

Gender roles are both more and less important than during the Eaten Age. There're too few people—all of who are tough and capable—in order to segregate work or duties wholly to one gender or another. Plenty of women wield spears, and plenty of men remain in strongholds and care for their children.

However, because of the realities of human anatomy, women are treated as more precious than men, simply because of their ability to reproduce young. A single man with twenty women can make twenty children a year, but a single woman can only make one child a year regardless of the number of men.

As such, men tend to take more proactive and dangerous roles within this survivor society—the warriors, the scavengers, the hunters, the foragers. Any position in which it is likely that one or more of those wandering the vast wastes will become injured or die is favored by men. In bloody battles or attacks by reavers, it is more likely that men will be killed and women captured. In short, men are expendable and women are not.



However, many men and women have foregone any notion of rearing children—some even imbibing alchemical compounds (or subjecting themselves to crude knifework) to become barren—in order to focus strictly on their own survival. Most view this as a selfless act, for bringing a child into this world, even accidentally, is horrible beyond imagining. Some would say needlessly cruel.

This gender dichotomy is not designed to create sexism for its own sake, but rather as an examination of human culture and reactions in a disastrous and hellish circumstance. GMs, tread here carefully—or ignore it altogether if you or your players are uncomfortable treading here at all.

# GOVERNMENT

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The few strongholds that have managed to maintain a semblance of stability have established protogovernments. Likewise, the more prominent nomad clans and large families have ad hoc leaders and clan elders who command respect and authority. However, there is little in the way of known or recognized borders, nations, or government entities. Instead, tribal rule has been reinstated—the strong and clever dominate the rest.

While many of the survivors initially tried to cling to their past lives' allegiances and loyalties, they quickly abandoned nationalism in the face of this hell. Over the last three generations, a few notable factions have begun to form, but the majority remain loyal only to their closest kin and clans.

# DAILY LIFE

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It isn't easy living in the Belly, but three generations have done so thus far. The majority of one's time in the Belly is spent foraging for food and the bare necessities of life, all while under threat of cannibals, reavers, and the hostile Belly itself.

# FOOD

People living within the Belly eat whatever they can, when they can. Few regions support any kind of natural growth, and the plants and animals that do live in these regions are often deformed, malnourished, or otherwise dangerous. Much of the world's supply of arable land has been eaten by the Beast; grains and other goods that aren't immediately perishable collect headward near the stomach's entrance.

Other groups have become experts in raising and herding various animals—especially hogs—that are hardy enough to eat the waste and detritus within the Beast’s gut, and are subsequently milked, bled, or eaten as meat. One of the few categories of animals that can truly excel within the Belly are insects, which serve as a staple of many a nomad’s diet and as a variety of ingredients in alchemy. Worms and parasites of various kinds are farmed and harvested in mass quantities, especially in regions or strongholds where having a large passel of hogs is impractical.

Fermented grains, legumes, and hardy tubers are common, as they can be carried or made to grow effectively in small pots, allowing someone to consume their typical calories in butter, beer, fat, meat, fungus, potatoes, and the rare leafy vegetable. Large stockpiles of spices, sugars, and more hardy vegetables (such as peppers and various trees) are often uncovered in silos and granaries that were eaten whole, their sealed and well-masoned exteriors preventing digestion within the Beast’s stomach.

Such finds are often the most valuable hauls that a scavenger can muster, so coveted that they’re rarely sold or traded, instead cherished and guarded against prying hands and hungry mouths.

Throughout their lives, nearly everyone has been forced to consume the meat and fluids of the Beast—sometimes for days, weeks, or even months. It tastes horrible, but is surprisingly nutritious and sustaining. It’s well known to corrupt the mind of anyone who maintains such a diet for long.

# WATER

Most survivors don't drink fresh water. The fluids that they do imbibe are largely byproducts of the food that they eat—blood, meat, bugs, various fungi, and the many parasitic creatures that feast off of the Beast itself.

That being said, the entrails of the Devourer are large enough that clouds and rain occasionally form, with the pure and clean water viewed as a boon by many but as suspicious and tainted by others. In its inexorable slog across the surface of the world, the Insatiable God has engorged itself upon many lakes and rivers, often trapping pools of water in areas of stone and wood that are slow to evaporate and digest in the humid atmosphere.

These sources of water are occasionally found and harvested, but few understand what makes some water safe to drink and other water prone to cause illness. It is generally regarded as much safer to simply drink hog's milk and be done with it.

# LIGHT AND FIRE

Many regions of the Beast's entrails glow with an alien luminescence—often in warm colors of red and orange, but sometimes with the sheer brilliance of purple and green. The innumerable chemical reactions within the Belly lead to some bizarre effects, and the countless parasites and plants and fungi that have attached to the great beast's innards have mutated beyond recognition.

Much of the Belly is shrouded in darkness, a few lances of light brought by the occasional bright polyp or wayward scavenger's lantern. However, the fats and oils inherent in the walls and structures of the Evergut are easy to burn, and burn brightly.

Scavengers and strongholds alike often cultivate living and glowing plants and creatures—insects akin to fireflies and mushrooms that pour light from their cracked caps—and burn large lanterns fueled by the fat of the Beast itself. When trees, fabrics, or other flammable waste is discovered—too soiled or digested to be repurposed into more-permanent tools—it is put to use as torches, lanterns, cooking fires, or fuel for the few smelters dotting the strongholds across the caverns.

Scavengers have grown accustomed to seeing in relatively low light, and would find the brightness of the sun painful and harsh to their eyes. Lanterns, candles, and weakly glowing lights are preferred over the white-hot flare of torches.

# DRESS

The entirety of the Beast's body is warm, humid, and temperate. While it doesn't possess a discernible climate, it does develop fog and small clouds, and even rains clearwater from time to time.

While the weather is tame, it is anything but comfortable. People are forced to wear fabrics and materials that are resistant to rot and the constant, insidious decay from the Beast's internal juices. Oiled and waxed leathers, wool, and even cured wood and bones make for suitable dress and armor. Those who have had to barter away more of their belongings often have little to wear, and slowly develop blisters, sores, and open wounds on their body from the digestive fumes in the air.

Many have learned from this, especially those that have been **bileborn**, and can tolerate the dissolving influence of the Beast better than most. Masks to cover the sensitive facial tissues, and to hopefully filter some of the moisture out of the air before it reaches the lungs, have become ubiquitous throughout all of the sustained cultures dwelling within the Belly.

Few people have more than one or two outfits that they wear in their daily life, and might possess a decorative piece of attire reserved and well protected for only the most special occasions, such as weddings or funerals. As the society within the Beast is built upon limited resources, recycled goods, and scavenged bits, nearly all of their complete clothes are cobbled together from pieces that have been farmed from animals or salvaged from the guts.



# DIRECTIONS

Over the years the Swallowed have developed a rudimentary system of directions. The cardinal directions used during the Eaten Age are no longer practical, often impossible to discern within the Belly's massive, cavernous innards. Instead, scavengers and their kin determine directions based upon the Beast itself—the directions of its head, ribs, and tail.

Something **headward** is closer to the Beast's head than where you are now, while something **tailward** is closer to the deeper, danker parts of the enormous creature. Pointing **ribward** can mean to either side of the Beast's ribs and periphery, with **right** and **left** distinctions as if from the perspective of the creature's own head. Occasionally, **upper** and **lower** are used to delineate a fork or altitude shift in the Belly.

For example, a scavenger might say that something is "right rib by headward," meaning it is closer to the Beast's right set of ribs, and up toward its head, in relation to the scavenger's current location.

Scavengers—and Swallowed in general—have become exceptionally apt at describing the rough look and size of things, highlighting what makes it distinct and memorable from the rest of its surroundings. It isn't unusual for a stronghold to give directions based on some key landmarks that all but the blindest scavengers would be able to follow without incident.



# STRONGHOLDS

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Entire mansions, churches, castles, and cities were swallowed whole by the Insatiable One. As such, a great many of these sturdy edifices have remained—at least partially—intact. The most impressive of these have served as epicenters of community, infighting, and struggle, as various groups attempt to control, maintain, and repair them.

While even the hardest stone slowly erodes within the Beast, truly impressive relics of the Eaten Age serve as bastions of hope and safety in the otherwise horrific wastes. The most prominent **strongholds** have developed around these points of light, cropping up as small and well-defended hamlets.

The Belly's denizens, desperate and violent, are often its most dangerous. As such, strongholds are wary of allowing newcomers, and their populations grow painfully slowly. Scavengers are often only as successful as their reputation, and trust is paramount among the Swallowed.

Scavengers who have done well to gain a stronghold's trust are often viewed with respect, or as a necessary evil, traveling between several locations, trading their wares, and coordinating pulls.

Other strongholds are mobile, built out of light and easily transportable structures, such as tents and littered wagons. These strongholds can pop up over the course of several hours, and dramatically alter the shape of power in a region.

Due to the sprawling, cavernous infrastructure of the Beast's befuddling organs and arteries, many strongholds can and do build in areas that are far more vertical or inclined than the grounds of traditional cities and settlements. The upward-sloping ribs of the gullet, nestled between the natural cracks and crannies there, make for warm and safe lodgings, even if built precariously over a several-hundred-pace drop.

Some strongholds and temporary bases of reavers and scavengers are built affixed to the upper regions of the Beast's flesh, dangling or mounted in such a way as to be inaccessible from the ground. Traveling scavengers must be aware of a potential attack from any angle or altitude.

In recent times, the proliferation of such strongholds, and the growth of their communities, has been cause for larger skirmishes and more bloodshed, as the already limited resources are pushed to the breaking point to keep the population stable.

# TECHNOLOGY

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Prior to the Devouring, the realms possessed a wide array of technology and scientific prowess. Some of the clans were on the verge of mastering iron and alloy metallurgy, while others had established enormous empires that stretched across continents and constructed massive architectural and engineering works.

As a rule of thumb, the time before can be roughly modeled after the late Byzantine Empire through the twelfth century, with a few powerful and advanced empires and an assortment of clans and tribes in various stages between the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Since only the world's smartest, bravest, and toughest managed to survive, much of that technological knowledge has been kept in some isolated cases, allowing for specialized engineers, doctors, alchemists, and metallurgists. However, most technology within the Belly is geared toward no-nonsense practicality, favoring things that are tough, easy to repair, or highly disposable. Ceramics, pottery, and things that make use of the naturally calcifying soils and properties of the Beast's stomach are incredibly common, as is the use of animal parts—leather, sinew, bladders, and bone.

Metalwork is a highly prized skill, with a heavy preference for bronze over most types of steel and iron, primarily due to its ability to resist corrosion and to be worked cold. Certain alloys of bronze have secret formulas, with some legendary weapons capable of holding an edge and sheen even after years of exposure to the Beast's caustic innards. The most famous and valuable form of iron is known as **cured steel**—harder and sharper than bronze, but just as resilient and resistant to corrosion. Few forges can get hot enough to manipulate it, so much of it is left in its original form.

The Swallowed take great care to preserve metal objects, constantly applying grease, wax, oil, and other sealants over it, while ensuring that their scabbards and sheaths are sturdy and dry. This has led to a proliferation of bone, glass, and stone-tipped weapons, especially semi-disposable weaponry such as arrows. One of the most commonly used melee weapons is a form of axe, a simple club to which is affixed small but highly sharp pieces of glass or obsidian, as it is more than capable of cutting or puncturing through a foe at a hundredth the cost of a metal variation.

Small-scale engineering has become more common in the last twenty years, primarily realized as self-powered mills and mechanisms. The Beast's breath and natural flowing interior allow for constantly churning production, put to excellent use for refining grain or shaping, heating, and curing clay.

Most new structures are built out of wattle and daub, as these raw materials are in exceeding abundance within the Beast's stomach. However, the occasional new wood, brick, or even stone structure is occasionally found. The natural movements of the enormous creature make laying solid foundations, and therefore large constructions, incredibly difficult.

Much more advanced and atypical technology can be found in the World Eater's gut, deep in the layers of ruins that have been long swallowed. In such dangerous places, overflowing with digestive juices, the bravest and most talented scavengers are able to bring up prized possessions and marvels of technology—such as sextants, rudimentary optics, advanced alchemical distillation equipment, siege weapons, simple machines, and other marvels that the Swallowed have never seen.

# CANNIBALS

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Some of the Swallowed have descended so far into debauchery, bloodlust, or desperation that they have developed a habit—and a taste—for human flesh.

Cannibals roam through the Belly, often in small packs of dangerous murderers and foul folk, prowling for any unsuspecting nomads, scavengers, or lesser strongholds which they can attack—and eat. While some didn't choose to become cannibals willingly, the social stigma is so great that they are often exiled from strongholds and reviled by nomads. They're forced to work and live with other cannibals, hunting down their human prey.

There is nothing quite so terrifying or dangerous as being pursued by a cabal of highly intelligent man-eaters, a fear many scavengers know well. The most dangerous of all are those who have resorted to feasting off of the Beast itself, driving them incoherently mad with bloodlust.

# REAVERS

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Raiders, murderers, thieves, brigands, and cutthroats—**reavers** are nefarious men and women who assault whoever they can. They believe that the common laws of courtesy and civility have no bearing in the Belly, and do whatever they wish to prolong their short and bloody lives.

Reavers are especially dangerous to scavengers, as they often wait for the scavengers to complete a pull and gather their haul, then strike when the prey are slow and fat with valuable salvage. Similarly, reavers will attack caravans, foragers, and even strongholds if their numbers grow to great enough strength. Reavers typically invest the majority of their spoils in tools of combat, and take what they can when they can.

Most scavengers do their best to simply avoid these savage killers, but the two groups invariably come to blows when they cross paths. The line blurs between organized groups of reavers and nomadic war parties, but the primary difference is that reavers are rarely related to one another in any way other than a shared love of bloodshed.

It can be tempting for angry, violent youths to join up with a reaving party for the promise of spoils, a life with purpose, and some semblance of power and control over an often hopeless destiny. Scavengers too, especially those who've found more pleasure in killing than pulling, sometimes devolve into reavers, preying upon their former comrades.

These traitors are considered the most deplorable, the most devilish of all, by other scavengers. They know the way scavengers operate, the way they think, when they're weakest and when to strike. If scavengers engage in battle with reavers known to be former comrades, it is incredibly unlikely any will be left alive.

# SLAVERY

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Slavery is an insidious, widespread disease throughout the Swallowed. When there are so few ways to display wealth, the powerful and cruel turn to controlling others. While most strongholds and nomadic clans are familial and share a common kinship with one another, some are large and powerful enough to support a slave-driven economy.

Many of the older strongholds, united under powerful leaders or a common ancestry during the Eaten Age, have institutionalized slavery to such extensive levels that it is considered completely moral and normal. The constant breeding of new slaves used in myriad ways, from the laborious to the downright unsavory, is seen as one of the few methods these swallowed “empires” have to retain control over their territory.

In recent memory, more than one slave army has been deployed to combat the nomadic clans and lesser strongholds in a region, claiming many lives and shifting the balance of power. Scavengers must navigate this dangerous territory, both evading the slave stockades and avoiding angering or interfering with the slave trade.

Dedicated cabals of slavers have begun to emerge, not dissimilar from reavers, with the express intent of capturing swaths of profitable slaves to be delivered to these powerhouses of corruption. The fate of the captured is often a short, miserable, tormented life.





# RELATIONSHIPS

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Not all hope and love is lost among the Swallowed. Indeed, such a desperate and difficult life makes the tender warmth of love feel like a white-hot fire raging within their downtrodden spirits. At no other time in human history has the need for caring relationships, loyalty, love, and the bonds of family been more important or more relevant to its culture.

Scavengers are most often motivated by a personal relationship and their own natural instincts. Driven by the needs of their community, the safety of their family, or the camaraderie of their friends, these brave men and women venture off into the boiling darkness in the hope that they can improve not only their life, but the lives of their loved ones.

# THE GROSS FACTOR

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How macabre, brutal, and slimy you want your rendition of the Belly to be is *entirely up to your group*. The point of telling stories in a place like the Evergut is that it serves as a clear and strong impetus for scavengers to exist: it's a brutal, post-apocalyptic, medieval world hyper-focused on survival. It isn't about heroics, it isn't about slaying the mythological creature, and it isn't about swimming through giant veins or trying to hack through an abscess the size of a boulder.

It's about the dangerous lives of the scavengers, their relationships, and the interplay between civilization and our feral nature as humans. When put under pressure, do your characters snap, or do they maintain a sense of dignity? The Evergut can be used more as a backdrop—although many players would cry “It could *never* be anything as subtle as a backdrop!” The characters are, for all intents and purposes, moving through a massive cave complex. Sure, the walls are made out of chitin or bone or flesh instead of rock, but is fleshy chitin so different from algae-slicked stone?

The descriptors and themes inherent in the Evergut are the constant twilight and darkness, the insidiously caustic and hostile environment, the fact that you can always go deeper and deeper into an ever-worsening nightmare, and the reality that the best hauls are in the blackest depths. If you're familiar with sword and sorcery or other RPG tropes, this isn't unfamiliar territory.

Some elements of the Evergut and Swallowed culture is irrevocably nasty for some folks; it crosses a line that they'd rather not cross. That's fine—and part of the reason it is so important to discuss these themes with your group beforehand. More advice on that in **III: Getting Started**.

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### THE BELLY RECAP

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The last remnants of humanity survive deep within the bowels of an incomprehensible worm called the Beast. The many great empires and nations peaked around twelfth-century technology, but their treasures and resources have all been swallowed.

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The characters are **scavengers**, brave (or insane) people who delve deeper into the Evergut in search of valuable loot and the necessities of life, driven by their natural instincts and the need to survive.

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# III: Getting Started

Let's go over how to actually get a **Belly of the Beast** game started, including agreeing upon a game concept and going over the basics of the rules.

## GAME CONCEPT

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While **Belly of the Beast** assumes that your characters will be scavengers looking for valuable hauls in the swallowed ruins, it helps to have a narrower, focused **game concept** to base your characters, challenges, and stories on.

As a group, discuss the kinds of things that you're looking to accomplish in the game, both as players and characters, starting out with what specifically your characters' **company** is doing and where exactly they're doing it.

These are your game's **purpose** and **place**.

## PURPOSE AND PLACE

Your game's **purpose** is your characters' goal or motivations. While each character is individually motivated to become a scavenger, you'll need to agree as a group about what your *company*'s purpose is.

Are you teaming up to go after one legendary and rare piece of loot? Are you trying to get by in a region overwhelmed by thieves and reavers? Are you loyal to a particular stronghold, and are trying to scavenge basic supplies for them?

This discussion generally leads into your characters' **place**, or where exactly they're fulfilling their purpose. You can start out pretty broad and vague, but be sure to narrow it down so everyone has some focus for their foreground, background, and initial story arcs.

A company of scavengers hundreds of leagues deep in the Beast's stomach, searching through some of the earliest swallowed ruins, is acting in a much different place—informing a much different purpose—than the same company operating out of a stronghold close to the creature's maw.





## DEEPER STARTING QUESTIONS

Some groups are fascinated by world-building and want to connect their characters to as many NPCs, locations, and interesting backstory arcs as possible. This effort often yields fantastic results if everyone's on board. If your group fits this description, you'll benefit from reading **Starting Questions**, the section after **Color**. Otherwise, after reading **Color**, you can skip to **Rules Basics** (page 45).

## COLOR

Agreeing upon your game's **color**—its tone, pace, and general subject matter—helps keep everyone on the same page. Think about what kinds of stories you want to create, what kinds of characters fit within those stories, and what kinds of events, obstacles, and actions elicit that type of experience.

You don't need to go into a lot of depth. Simply agreeing upon a “light-hearted, dysfunctional family” color works fine, or similarly a game that's “dark and gritty, where we're down to our last resources.”

# STARTING QUESTIONS

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When you're creating your characters alongside your game concept, many groups find it helpful to answer a series of (optional) starting questions that connect the characters to each other and to the local strongholds and NPCs at the beginning of the game.

These questions are typically drafted by the GM, but the entire group can participate. Write questions that apply to individual characters (or players), not the whole group, and be sure they're appropriate to your agreed-upon game concept and color. It's recommended that you start off with five to ten questions.

The questions need to be:

1. open-ended
2. specific
3. evocative

Open-ended questions lead to more interesting answers than “yes” or “no.” Specific questions give context to the players as they consider their answers. Evocative questions help ground the players firmly in your group's own interpretation of the Evergut.

For example, a group has decided that their company is composed of loyal citizens of a stronghold, and that they go on pulls to supply and bolster their hold's influence in the region.

The GM comes up with the following questions:

1. Which of your surviving family members live in the stronghold? (Minimum of one.)
2. How did you earn your stronghold leader's trust?
3. What, as a player, do you think is your stronghold's most interesting or unique feature?
4. Where, as a character, is your favorite place to spend time in your stronghold?
5. Who in your stronghold do you trust the most? (Outside of family, preferably.)
6. Who in your stronghold do you trust the least?
7. Something happened between the local nomads and your stronghold that greatly upset you. What was it?
8. What was the single most valuable or unique piece of salvage you've brought home?
9. Who was close to you that died? How?
10. What do you think is your stronghold's greatest weakness?

You'll want to hand these questions out before your first session or during the preliminary session when everybody is making their characters (again, preferably together). Have each player answer their questions alone, giving you a wide array of leads and local ties for the company. To be clear, don't just come

up with a bunch of answers for the players to pick from—give each player some questions to answer. Their unique responses will create some diversity in and connection among their characters' local community.

If you'd prefer, rather than gearing the questions toward a stronghold or location, you can focus them on other scavengers within the company or NPCs outside of it. Alternatively, you can ignore these questions during the first few sessions, and then ask them over time or at some point later in the campaign, once the players have had a chance to explore their characters.

This is a great place to establish the characters' **Bonds**, which are discussed in more detail on page 138.

# RULES BASICS

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Whenever your character attempts a **Task**, or an action that:

1. has a chance of failure, and
2. bears significant narrative weight

you'll roll dice to determine whether they **overcome** the Task. Similarly, when you fight an **Enemy**, you'll treat them just like a Task. Multiple related Tasks—and sometimes Enemies—make up a **Scene**.

Only players ever roll dice. The GM never rolls.

Characters can accomplish most of their typical activities without issue; these everyday actions are not Tasks, so don't roll for them. Tasks are often risky, dangerous, or difficult, and exist to put pressure on both the characters and their story. So, kicking down a door isn't a Task—unless that door blocks your path of escape from a closing group of ravenous cannibals.

When you roll for a Task, you always get to roll one **Base Die (BD)**, you might add **Advantage Dice (AD)**, and you can add **Instinct Dice (ID)** by spending from your Instinct pool. You can never spend more than 5 ID on one roll.

You can never roll more than 10D at a time.

Each Task has a **Difficulty**. To overcome a Task, you must roll **successes** equal to or greater than its Difficulty.

A die is a success if its rolled **face value (1–6)** is high enough. Which face values count as a success depends upon which **Skill** you're using and its **Skill Rank**—how proficient you are at it. The better your Skill Rank, the more face values count as a success.

When you use a Rotten Skill, which has the lowest rank, each rolled die is a success only on a 6. When you use a Brilliant Skill, which has the highest rank, each rolled die is a success on a 3 or higher.

You can spend ID from your **Instinct pool** to add the same number of dice to your roll. You can never spend more than 5 ID on one roll. To add ID to your Instinct pool, you must act in agreement with your character's **Instincts** or complete profitable **pulls**.

Not every roll requires spending ID—sometimes it's better to save up your ID until you really need them. However, the more ID you spend on a roll, the more likely your character is to succeed.

## SCENES

A Scene is a collection of related Tasks and Enemies. Scenes help everyone keep track of what takes place when and where, as well as how many dice have been earned and spent. Scenes in **Belly of the Beast** are just like pivotal scenes in a novel, movie, or video game—where the excitement happens and every second counts.

Each Scene has a rough **cadence** you'll follow:

### SETUP

The GM describes the Scene and its pertinent elements, then the players set the stage by exchanging in-character dialogue or asking for clarifications on the circumstances.

## DEFINITION

The GM defines each pressing Task and Enemy's Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold. (These are discussed more in **V: Gameplay** and **VI: Game Mastering**.) Players can ask out-of-character questions or clarifications.

## ACTION

The characters, NPCs, and environment all act and react to one another. The players roll dice to accomplish Tasks and defeat Enemies. This is the meat of the Scene, where new Tasks and Enemies can come in, and established Tasks and Enemies can be completed or leave.

## RESOLUTION

The GM describes how the Scene resolves and the circumstances the characters find themselves in. The players can ask for clarifications on anything pertinent, whether in-character or out-of-character.

## CONCLUSION

Everyone discusses whether the Scene warranted the characters acquiring any resources, pertinent information, or Instinct Dice. Characters add ID to their Instinct pools only during this phase. The Scene ends, and gameplay continues.

# OUTSIDE OF SCENES

Often the characters' actions and stories will fall outside of a Scene. Whenever the GM describes the story in broad, sweeping actions or montages, or skips over long periods of inconsequential time, this falls outside of a Scene.

For example, if the characters stopped in a stronghold and decided to collect some resources, rest up, and meet back together after several hours, then the intervening time would fall outside of a Scene, and could just be briefly described.

GMs, feel free to have players roll for **downtime** and **long-term Tasks** if they bear significant narrative weight—otherwise, keep rolls to within Scenes.





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## RULES BASICS RECAP

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**Tasks:** difficult, important actions

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**Enemies:** opponents to be overcome like Tasks

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**Scenes:** collections of Tasks and Enemies related to a common goal

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Players roll dice; the GM doesn't.

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Rolls = 1 BD + any ID + any AD

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You can add up to 5 ID on your roll.

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No more than 10D can be rolled at a time.

---

To overcome a Task, you must roll successes equal to or greater than its Difficulty.

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When rolling, the Skill Rank of the Skill you choose determines which face values of a die count as a success. There is often only one relevant Skill for a roll.

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Scenes follow a cadence: Setup, Definition, Action, Resolution, and Conclusion.

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Instinct Dice earned during a Scene aren't gained until the Scene's Conclusion Phase.

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# IV: Characters

Being a scavenger isn't a glamorous job. You're not usually seen as a hero, or a savior, or even as someone particularly dangerous. Sometimes, people downright distrust, disagree with, or even disdain you. However, scavenging is necessary for survival, and those who make a profession of it are highly skilled and begrudgingly respected.

As a scavenger, you know that being the strongest, the fastest, the smartest, or the best at killing is irrelevant. All that matters is your ability to fill a role in your company and survive enough pulls to retire a few years before your last. An entire world of ruins, rubble, and salvage is waiting to be taken—you just have to climb through hundreds of leagues of putrid waste, rivers of digestive juices, devoured mountains, and chewed-up forests, while fighting other companies, reavers, and cannibals along the way.

That doesn't sound so bad, right?

# OVERVIEW

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Surviving the Devouring—or even being born within the belly of the Beast—means your character is already an order of magnitude tougher, smarter, and meaner than anyone (probably) you know in real life.

Hundreds of millions of people were eaten over the course of decades, and of those, less than one in a thousand survived the first few weeks. A year later, maybe one in a thousand of *those* survivors made it, and these dangerous and determined folk are your kin, if you're not one of them yourself.

Children born within the Belly have known no other world, and while many don't make it past childhood, those who do are terrifyingly tough, clever, and focused on survival.

Even other survivors view scavengers as especially crazy. Delving deeper into the Hungry God's innards, digging through piles of rock and excrement in search of valuables, and fighting other maniacs on your way back to a stronghold means that you're a cut above (or maybe below) the rest.

However, scavenging is a dangerous job, and you're unlikely to survive long if you rely solely on your skill. Over time, you'll improve, you'll earn your fellows' trust, and you'll all be able to live at least a little more comfortably than when you started out.

New characters are scavengers that haven't been in the business for very long, but have managed to prove to themselves and others that they're worth hiring into a company. That means you'll screw up about as often as you'll do well, but you're not a complete liability.



# CHARACTER CREATION OUTLINE

1. Create a **character concept**
2. Select two **Instincts**
  - a. Each Instinct grants you a **Maneuver**
3. Select or define your **Specialty**
  - a. Each Specialty lets you automatically overcome certain Tasks, or gives you Permission to attempt Tasks others can't
4. Rank your **Skills** (Awareness, Coordination, Cunning, Influence, Lore, Might, Resolve, Stealth) in one of four ways:
  - a. Standard: 1 Brilliant, 1 Capable, 5 Acceptable, 1 Rotten
  - b. Versatile: 2 Capable, 6 Acceptable
  - c. Focused: 1 Brilliant, 2 Capable, 3 Acceptable, 2 Rotten
  - d. Specialized: 1 Brilliant, 3 Capable, 1 Acceptable, 3 Rotten
5. Select or define your one **Talent**, a word or phrase that describes how you excel in a particular circumstance, granting +1AD to your relevant rolls
6. Optional: as a group, answer some **starting questions** or define any **Bonds**

# CHARACTER CONCEPT

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Your character should align with the game concept and work well with the other players' characters. If you're playing a high-combat game about fighting an enemy reaver faction, a haggler and socializer might not fit as well as a warrior. That's not to say it couldn't work, but just bear it in mind.

Conceptualizing your character before making mechanical decisions (such as choosing Skills and Specialties) will help you stay consistent during the creation process and will give you roleplaying guidelines during play.

When starting out, break your character down into their **Who** and **What**.

Your character's Who is their personality, traits, motivation, and idiosyncrasies.

Your character's What is their role, expertise, and physical description.



# BECOMING A SCAVENGER

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How did you become a scavenger? Did you have a life prior to the Devouring? Or were you born within the stinking gut of the Beast? What made you interested in pursuing the lost treasures of the Eaten Age, and what motivates you to keep going out on such dangerous pulls?

## BACKGROUND

Your character's **background** is their early life and experiences. What events encouraged you to become a scavenger? What are your earliest memories? Have you ever seen the sun? What major impacts shaped your character's personality and skillset?

# FOREGROUND

Your character's **foreground** is their recent history. What twists, complications, or occurrences led them to what they're doing *now*? The foreground can be the last three farrows, sleeps, or hours leading up to the start of the game.

# SKILLS

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Whenever you attempt a Task, it will fall under one of the eight **Skills**. Skills are bundles of experience and expertise that describe your character's ability to tackle related actions.

Whenever you attempt a Task, you will select one Skill to use—called the **relevant Skill**. For some Tasks, multiple Skills might be relevant. In this case, talk with the GM about which one makes the most sense.

The eight Skills are described below.

## AWARENESS

The ability to detect your surroundings and the intents of others. Physical perception, inner intuition, and keen insight.

## COORDINATION

The ability to move precisely. Ranged combat, Dodging incoming attacks, balance, agility, and overall finesse.

## CUNNING

The ability to think quickly and tactfully. Your mind for strategy, tactics, acumen, anticipation, and logic.

## INFLUENCE

The ability to sway others' opinions and emotions. Your charm and knack for negotiation, persuasion, and intimidation.

## LORE

The ability to call upon your memory and knowledge. Recalling lore, history, or social customs, or applying your knowledge to mental or artisanal endeavors.

## MIGHT

The ability to apply strength and force. Melee combat, Blocking incoming attacks, brute strength, and running speed.

## RESOLVE

The ability to resist pain, wounds, fear, and illness. Your health, immunity, willpower, and fortitude.

## STEALTH

The ability to conceal your thoughts and actions. Telling lies, hiding in the shadows, remaining inconspicuous, and moving silently.

# SKILL RANKS

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Each of your character's Skills has a **Skill Rank**: Rotten, Acceptable, Capable, or Brilliant. The higher a Skill's Rank, the more likely you'll be to overcome Tasks and defeat Enemies when using it.

When you roll for a Task, your relevant Skill determines which face values (1–6) on each rolled die count as a **success**.

## ROTTEN (6)

You're well below the average of your peers, and are more likely to cause serious problems.

## ACCEPTABLE (5+)

You're not a complete waste to have along, but you can't be relied upon either.

## CAPABLE (4+)

You've cut your teeth in the business, and have a respectable degree of skill. You're likely to succeed at most attempts, but haven't reached true mastery.

## BRILLIANT (3+)

You're as good as they come, and have to pick up the slack for the rest of your crew. It's unlikely that you'll make a mess of things, and only the most arduous obstacles will challenge you.

| Skill Rank | Success On |
|------------|------------|
| Rotten     | 6          |
| Acceptable | 5+         |
| Capable    | 4+         |
| Brilliant  | 3+         |

Most scavengers are tougher than your typical survivor, and have the skills and expertise to prove it. However, some characters are more specialized than others. To determine how specialized your character is, select a **Skill Rank Array**:

## STANDARD

1 Brilliant, 1 Capable, 5 Acceptable, 1 Rotten

## VERSATILE

2 Capable, 6 Acceptable

## FOCUSED

1 Brilliant, 2 Capable, 3 Acceptable, 2 Rotten

## SPECIALIZED

1 Brilliant, 3 Capable, 1 Acceptable, 3 Rotten

If you're not sure what makes the most sense for your character, just stick with the **Standard Array**—it is the best representation of a typical scavenger, and will ensure that you can succeed fairly often.

As for fairness and balance, the Skill Rank Arrays will let you roll equal numbers of successes if you use all eight Skills equally. They're only different in how much you'll concentrate your competence.

# INSTINCTS

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Select **two** of the Instincts below. These are what drive your character, how they behave under stress, and their innate characteristics that motivate them.

For each Instinct, select **one** of its numbered **Instinct Maneuvers**. For example, a character with the **Curiosity** Instinct might choose *Curiosity 1: Spend 1 ID to learn of something immediately useful that's currently unknown in the Scene*. Since they picked Curiosity 1, they couldn't also pick Curiosity 2.

Acting in line with your Instincts is one way to acquire **Instinct Dice (ID)**, motivating you to roleplay in a way that befits your character's nature.

## CURIOSITY

*You desire to know everything*

### Choose one:

1. Spend 1 ID to learn of something immediately useful that's currently unknown in the Scene.
2. When you spend ID to identify the reason for an occurrence, intent, attitude, place, or object, those ID count as automatic successes.

## FEAR

*You try to recognize any and all danger*

### Choose one:

1. Spend 1 ID to identify every potential danger in the Scene.
2. When you spend ID to retreat, evade, hide, or flee from something you fear, those ID count as automatic successes.

## GREED

*You must have all that you desire*

**Choose one:**

1. Spend 1 ID to discover the most valuable objects in the Scene or current place.
2. When you spend ID to haggle, sell, or profit more from a salvage, those ID count as automatic successes.

## LOYALTY

*You are devoted to your kin and comrades*

**Choose one:**

1. Spend 1 ID to suffer a Complication, Consequence, or Injury in an ally's stead.
2. When you spend ID to complete a Scene or Long Task with help from other scavengers, those ID count as automatic successes.





## VIOLENCE

*You know that killing bestows ultimate authority*

### Choose one:

1. Spend 1 ID to learn an enemy's weakness, granting AD as appropriate. When you attack or act in a way that exploits this weakness, you are automatically successful. If such attacks or actions would be impossible, you merely gain Permission to act or attack in this way.
2. When you spend ID to ignore Injuries, Complications, or Consequences during combat, those ID count as automatic successes.

## INSTINCTS IN PLAY

Katarod has the **Greed** and **Violence** Instincts. He's naturally selfish, and only entered the scavenging business as a means to secure his personal comfort. He's found that living in the Belly removes any call for civility or pacificity, and prefers to solve his problems with a sharp knife.

He selects one Instinct Maneuver for each of his Instincts, going with Greed 1 and Violence 1. He wants to be able to quickly identify the most valuable salvage, as well as hit his enemies where it hurts the most. The GM starts Katarod with 10 ID in his Instinct pool, the same as the rest of the characters.

Upon discovering a potentially profitable ruin, Katarod's company sets out to complete a pull. When they arrive, Katarod spends 1 ID to activate his Greed 1 Instinct Maneuver, uncovering the most valuable item in the Scene. The spent ID is removed from his Instinct pool, and the GM narrates how Katarod discovers a master-crafted bronze sword. Katarod now has 9 ID in his pool.

On his way back from the pull, Katarod's company gets ambushed by a rival group of scavengers. They demand half of the haul, or else they'll take all of it by force. Katarod doesn't want any part of that, so he spends 1 ID to activate his Violence 1 Instinct Maneuver, discerning the weakness of his enemy. The GM tells Katarod how he recognizes that the leader's senses are dulled by milk whiskey, and that it would be easy to get close to her undetected. (In mechanical terms, the Difficulty of sneaking up on her would be low.)

While his comrades are at a standoff with the other group, he stalks around the darkness (a Stealth roll with some AD), then grabs the rival leader and slits her throat wide open (a Might roll against lower Difficulty because she's unaware). Chaos ensues, and the battle ends in a bloody mess—with Katarod on top. He spent another 5 ID during this battle, so his Instinct pool now has 3 ID.

During the Conclusion Phase of the Scene, the GM awards Katarod with Instinct Dice for **acting instinctively**: 5 ID for his Greed of keeping the entire haul, and 3 ID for committing Violence rather than sharing. His behavior was in line with both of his Instincts, and so he's awarded 8 ID for the Scene. These ID are added to his Instinct pool, which now stands at 11 ID.

# SPECIALTIES

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Each character has one **Specialty**: a role or area of expertise that describes them and their abilities. Specialties grant or deny **Permission** to perform Tasks in extenuating circumstances, and they let you **automatically overcome** certain Tasks, meaning you overcome without even needing to roll. Note, though, that some Tasks may be too difficult to automatically overcome, at the GM's discretion.

Occasionally, the GM might judge that your character's Specialty is especially relevant or useful to a Task, warranting an **Advantage Dice** bonus, generally a max of +1AD.

Players, you may **select** one of the below Specialties or **define** your own.

If you want to define your own, follow the same format as the pre-defined Specialties: it gives you Permission to attempt a particular set of Tasks that others would find impossible, and it gives you automatic success on particular Tasks. Ensure that everyone approves of any self-defined Specialties.

## ALCHEMIST

*You're an expert in concoctions and chemicals*

- You have **Permission** to attempt advanced alchemy Tasks that others would find impossible.
- You **automatically overcome** mundane alchemical Tasks and can collect ingredients while traveling.

## BILEBORN

*You were birthed in one of the Belly's most bilious regions*

- You have **Permission** to attempt environmental Resolve Tasks that others would find impossible.
- You **automatically overcome** Tasks to resist the effects of caustic, hot, or acidic environments.

## CHIRURGEON

*Your allies fear your saws nearly as much as their enemies' swords*

- You have **Permission** to attempt surgery and advanced medical Tasks that others would find impossible.
- You **automatically overcome** Tasks to apply basic first aid, stabilizing, or cleaning treatable wounds.

## CONSPIRATOR

*You know people, and can call in a favor when necessary*

- You have **Permission** to roll Awareness or Influence to determine if you know any friends or foes in the area.
- You **automatically overcome** when calling in **favors** that others owe you, even if it puts them in a bad position.

## ENGINEER

*What others would view as sorcery you view as the proper application of leverage*

- You have **Permission** to attempt construction, engineering, and architectural Tasks that others would find impossible.
- You **automatically overcome** Tasks to create simple tools and machines such as levers, wheels, and pulleys.

## FORAGER

*You're able to find scraps for dinner even in the dankest and darkest pits*

- You have **Permission** to roll Cunning or Lore to forage edible food or helpful bits of debris anywhere in the Evergut.
- You **automatically overcome** Tasks to feed yourself, regardless of your position or supplies.

## IRON-LUNG

*You're gifted with long-lasting breath, and can avoid noxious fumes better than anyone*

- You have **Permission** to, every so often, roll Resolve to hold your breath indefinitely, even when submerged or enveloped.
- You **automatically overcome** Tasks to avoid the negative effects of non-lethal fumes, gases, and smoke.

## SMITH

*You can scrape together even the most rusted detritus and make it useful again*

- Select one craft, such as armor, tools, melee weapons, or ranged weapons. You have **Permission** to roll smithing Tasks related to this craft that others would find impossible.
- You **automatically overcome** Tasks to make basic repairs, construct simple tools, or collect raw materials related to your craft.

## TRACKER

*If it moves, you can track it. If there's a path, you can find it.*

- You have **Permission** to roll for tracking and pathfinding Tasks that others would find impossible.
- You **automatically overcome Tasks** to estimate rough distances, directions, or ways out of convoluted paths or environments.

## TRADER

*You'll never settle for less than optimal price, and you usually get your way*

- You have **Permission** to roll when negotiating bargains or deals that others would find impossible or completely unreasonable.
- You **automatically overcome** at Tasks to estimate the value of things, know where and who to sell to that will generate the best profit, and conduct other mercantile activities.



# SPECIALTIES IN PLAY

Katarod is a self-serving, arguably cruel man. However, he's loyal to his clan and his company, using his knack for hard negotiation (and ending arguments violently) to good effect for his crew. Katarod's player imagined him as an excellent tradesman and negotiator, so he selects the **Trader** as his Specialty.

While at a stronghold's gate, he demands that his company be allowed inside the safety of its walls, only to be met by suspicion and hostility from those within the hold. Katarod says that his company won't be made to pay for access or do anything to prove their worth, but instead will be taken directly to the stronghold's leader and given an opportunity to sell their wares. Katarod wants to roll Influence to convince and cow the guards to his demands.

Normally, the GM wouldn't allow such an outrageous conversation to warrant a roll—few self-respecting guards would allow strange and demanding scavengers into their one and only place of safety. However, since Katarod has the Trader Specialty, he *does* have Permission to make a roll.

Katarod rolls and overcomes this Task, so he and his company enter the stronghold. Once inside, Katarod automatically knows how valuable his haul is to the people here, and doesn't allow them to suggest an unfair price. If he didn't have his Trader Specialty, he might not have known that the stronghold's people are in desperate need of grain, and that his haul is worth five times here what it would be somewhere else.

# TALENTS

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Every character starts with one **Talent**, a freeform, self-defined ability that describes their predilections, knacks, or gifts.

While Skills describe competence in a broad field, Talents focus on one type of action or circumstance. To create your character's Talent, just name a situation that your character excels in. For example:

- ***Berserker***: You get overwhelmed with bloodlust and hack your enemies into pieces.
- ***Silvertongue***: You find it easy to manipulate others with your honeyed words and cunning ways.
- ***Nimble***: You're incredibly balanced and flexible, able to slip through obstacles and restraints with ease.

When your character acts in a way related to their Talent, you gain +1AD to your roll. For example, if your character had the ***Silvertongue*** Talent and attempted to convince a guard to overlook some nefarious activities, you would get +1AD to your roll.

When creating your Talent, ensure that it is broad enough to come up often during play, but not too often—once a session is about right. For instance, you wouldn't want a Talent so broad that it encapsulates an entire Skill; nor one so narrow that it hardly ever comes up, and even when it does it isn't particularly useful.

An example of a Talent that's too broad might be ***Stealthy***, which would essentially grant +1AD on any Stealth Task. Instead, ***Shadow Stalker*** might be better, granting +1AD only when quietly stalking around in the dark.

An example of a Talent that's too narrow might be ***Impervious to Insults***, only adding to Resist rolls when being insulted. Hardly worth an entire Talent. But ***Iron Will*** is perfectly appropriate, granting +1AD whenever the character's willpower is challenged.

As characters **advance**, they can acquire new Talents, following the same naming procedure, or can improve the bonus of an existing Talent by +1AD, up to +3AD.

If your character has multiple Talents that relate to a Task, the GM may allow these bonuses to stack.

# EXAMPLE TALENTS

|               |                |                |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Raw Strength  | Sharp Senses   | Calm Presence  |
| Balanced      | Silvertongue   | Berserker      |
| Navigator     | Whisperstep    | Swordsman      |
| Master Smith  | Tactician      | Negotiator     |
| Strong-willed | Vast Memory    | Botanist       |
| Impervious    | Poison Drinker | Terrain Master |

# EQUIPMENT

After defining all of your character's traits, you'll define or select their equipment. In short, equipment provides Advantage Dice when relevant, and it grants Permission to attempt certain Tasks that would otherwise be impossible.

Select a collection of equipment that makes sense for your character, with the GM's approval.

More information about equipment can be found on page 116.

# ADVANCEMENT

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A character earns an **Advance** by completing **three** successful pulls, each with a haul of greater value than the previous.

When you earn an Advance, you gain the following benefits:

- Improve a Skill by one Skill Rank
- Define a new Talent, **or** upgrade an existing Talent by +1AD
- If you choose, swap out your Specialty
- If you choose, swap out one or both of your Instincts, along with their Instinct Maneuvers

A Skill Rank can't be raised above Brilliant, and a Talent can't be upgraded to give more than a +3AD bonus.

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## Character Creation Recap

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Come up with a **character concept** that aligns with your group's game concept.

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Think of your character's **Who** (who they are, how they behave) and **What** (what they do, what they're good at, what they look like, their function).

---

Create your character's **background** (their history and life) and **foreground** (recent activity right before the game starts).

---

Select two **Instincts** that drive your character, and one **Instinct Maneuver** from each selected Instinct.

---

Choose your character's **Skill Rank Array**, giving each **Skill** a **Skill Rank**. When you roll with a higher Skill Rank, your dice produce successes on more face values. The ranks from worst to best—and their face values counting as successes—are Rotten (6), Acceptable (5+), Capable (4+), and Brilliant (3+).

---

Pick or define a **Talent**, a specific action or field your character excels at.

---

Pick a **Specialty**, a role or group of actions your character is especially good at.

---

If you wish, the players can answer some **starting questions** to flesh out the local setting and their characters' connections.

---

A character earns an **Advance** by completing three successful pulls, each more valuable than the last.

---



# V: Gameplay

Most often, characters affect the story and other characters by attempting **Tasks**: difficult actions that could fail and bear significant narrative weight.

To attempt a Task, pick a **relevant Skill** and make a **roll**.

On any roll, you'll start with one die (the **Base Die**), and if you have any Advantage you'll add **Advantage Dice (AD)**. You can also spend **Instinct Dice (ID)** from your **Instinct pool** to add dice in equal number to your roll. You can never spend more than 5 ID on a roll.

You can never roll more than 10D at once.

Every Task has a **Difficulty** of 1 to 5. To overcome a Task, you must roll **successes** equal to or greater than its Difficulty.



Most often, a Task is a **Short Task**, which can only be attempted and rolled for once. Sometimes, a Task can be completed incrementally—over time and with multiple rolls, even from multiple characters—which is called a **Long Task**.

To overcome a Short Task, you must roll successes equal to or greater than its Difficulty. If you roll at least one success, but fewer than the Difficulty, the GM can trigger **Complications**, **Consequences**, or even **Injuries**. These are described more starting on page 85.

For Long Tasks, if you roll any successes, the Task Difficulty decreases by the same amount. For example, if you roll 3 successes on a Difficulty 4 Long Task, the Task becomes a Difficulty 1 Long Task ( $4 - 3 = 1$ ). However, each time you don't overcome a Long Task, the GM can trigger Complications.

If you roll more successes than a Task's Difficulty, the GM may give you additional benefits relevant to the Task or Scene. For example, you might hit an extra foe, acquire more loot, learn more information, or take less time.

Tasks can also have a **Threshold**. When you roll successes on a Task with Threshold, reduce the number of successes you roll by the Threshold value. For example, if you roll 3 successes on a Task with Difficulty 3 and Threshold 1, you *wouldn't* overcome the Task: Threshold 1 removes 1 success, leaving 2 successes, which is less than Difficulty 3.

Whenever you roll for a Task and get **0 successes**, this triggers **Consequences**.

The magnitude of an Injury, Consequence, or Complication increases with the Task's **Severity**.

Throughout much of these rules, the Difficulty, Threshold, and Severity are collectively referred to as the **DST**.

# SCENE DIFFICULTY

---

GMs, you can combine an entire Scene's worth of Tasks and Enemies into a single, easy-to-track **Scene Difficulty**.

A Scene Difficulty is treated as a Long Task, where multiple players can roll for their characters' combined efforts in overcoming the Scene.

Every time a player rolls against the Scene Difficulty and *doesn't* overcome it, trigger Complications or Consequences as you see fit and as the narrative demands.

To set a Scene Difficulty, estimate the average Difficulty of a Task in the Scene, and multiply it (roughly) by the number of players or by the predicted number of Tasks in the Scene.

For example, the GM judges that the average Task in a particular Scene will have Difficulty 2. As there are four players, the GM sets the Scene Difficulty to 8 ( $2 \times 4 = 8$ ) so each player will have an opportunity to contribute.

The GM could have instead estimated that the Scene would have roughly six Tasks, and therefore set the Scene Difficulty to 12 ( $2 \times 6 = 12$ ).

Whatever makes the most sense in the narrative, as well as up to the judgment of the GM, is how Scene Difficulty should be determined (with a rough range of 2 and 20).

When you set Scene Difficulty, don't multiply the Threshold or Severity; just use whatever they would be for the equivalent Short Task (so between 1 and 5).

If you wish, you can give a Scene multiple Difficulties based upon the company's possible Approaches. For example, a Scene might have Difficulty 5 for the company to stealthily slip by a band of reavers, Difficulty 10 to take the reavers head-on in combat, or Difficulty 15 to negotiate with the reavers on fair footing.

This is discussed in much greater detail both later in this chapter and in **VI: Game Mastering**.

---

**Scene Difficulty** combines all of the Tasks in a Scene into one Difficulty, generally between 2 and 20. To determine it, multiply the average Task by the number of scavengers or Tasks in the Scene. Any successes reduce the Scene Difficulty, as in a Long Task.

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# CONSEQUENCES

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Consequences are developments that hinder the characters, their current Task, or the Scene as a whole. Consequences are triggered when characters:

1. roll 0 successes, or
2. roll fewer successes than a Short Task's Difficulty

The magnitude of a Consequence depends on the triggering element's **Severity**, which is generally equal to the Difficulty of the attempted Task, but the GM can change it to fit the context.

Consequences typically increase the current Task's Difficulty, Severity, or Threshold. They can add new elements to the Scene, including more Short Tasks, Long Tasks, and Enemies. They also can remove helpful circumstances or equipment from one or more characters, or even cause characters to sustain Injuries.

| Severity | Consequence                                       |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1        | Trivial: Task failure or costly success           |
| 2        | Minor: force new roll or Task failure             |
| 3        | Moderate: increase Difficulty                     |
| 4        | Major: sustain Injury, degrade Skill              |
| 5        | Critical: sustain Injuries, unrecoverable failure |

Generally, the narrative effects of Consequences end when the Scene ends—barring their lingering effects, such as Injuries. However, the GM might end the current Task and begin a new Task, or even begin a new Scene.

Similarly, Consequences can have fallout that greatly impact the characters' lives, reputations, or fortunes.

Characters can try to remove Consequences by rolling related Short or Long Tasks—such as trying to treat a wound or stop a mudslide—but will often have to solve these new problems through narrative means.

GMs, Consequences are an important tool to make the characters' lives more challenging and interesting. Don't be afraid to leverage Consequences to punish the characters, but never use them to impede gameplay. There's plenty more guidelines on this throughout this chapter and **VI: Game Mastering**.

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**Consequences** are triggered by rolling 0 successes or by failing a Short Task. They hinder the characters—such as by giving them Injuries, creating new Tasks, or escalating the situation negatively.

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# COMPLICATIONS

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Complications are twists that make a Scene worse, but rarely if ever directly affect the characters. They're less severe than Consequences, and escalate the Scene's tension and current obstacles rather than introduce new elements.

Complications can be triggered when:

1. a character fails to overcome a Long Task, or
2. a character rolls more than 0 successes, but fewer than a Short Task's Difficulty, or
3. all of the characters in a Scene have acted but haven't yet overcome the Scene

For example, a player rolls on a Difficulty 5 Long Task and gets 3 successes. Since they got more than 0 successes, their roll shouldn't trigger Consequences, but they didn't overcome the Long Task either. As such, the GM punishes them with a new Complication: in this case, forcing a roll for a related but separate Short Task.

Later, the company is working together to move some rubble, a Scene Difficulty of 10. All four players roll and get a total of 7 successes. Since that isn't enough to overcome the Scene, there's a Complication: One of the pulleys that the company is using to lift a massive boulder breaks. The rock falls and its echo reverberates throughout the area, which might alert nearby reavers, hostile scavengers, or even packs of cannibals.

Complications don't give Injuries or cause direct setbacks—those are reserved for Consequences. However, they can cause Enemies or Tasks to suddenly change, escalate, or get an opportunity to act aggressively.

For example, a Consequence could be “your packhog falls off the cliff and dies, with all of your supplies attached to it,” while a Complication could be “the packhog becomes frightened and starts squealing and running around.”

---

**Complications** escalate or twist a Scene or Task, but rarely directly impact the scavengers. Complications are generally time or narrative sensitive, but can be triggered by poor rolls or failed Tasks.

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# INJURIES

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Characters can suffer **Injuries**, often by failing at a Task or being hit by an Enemy. Injuries hinder one's ability to act in various ways: an Injury might degrade the injured character's relevant Skill Rank, force them to roll with fewer dice or against higher Threshold, or even deny them Permission for certain actions.

Each Injury has a **Severity**, from 1 to 5. Its Severity depends on the Severity of the Task or Enemy that caused it. Often they're equal, but Injuries gained from Enemy attacks can be reduced in Severity by rolling successes while defending.

The more severe an Injury, the more dire it is and the longer it lasts. Injury 4 is considerably more painful and life-threatening than Injury 1. The effects of an Injury last for weeks equal in number to its Severity, so Injury 4 would last four weeks after being treated.

For example, a character falls down a steep decline, taking Injury 1 to their leg. The GM notes that the character, until the Injury is treated and heals, must add +1 Threshold to any Task they attempt that uses the injured leg, such as running, lifting heavy objects, climbing, or fighting.



Later, the character receives Injury 3 to the same leg, escalating the wound to Injury 4 (Injury 1 + Injury 3). Now, until the Injury is resolved, the character loses Permission to attempt any Task that would require two legs, moves at a much slower pace, and can hardly walk without assistance. This will translate to increased Threshold in numerous circumstances.

If you have an Injury, you can use certain alchemical remedies to ignore the Injury's effects for a time—however, such medicines often come with their own unpleasant or even debilitating side effects. You can read more about alchemy on page 119.

To treat an Injury, you or an ally must overcome a Lore Task, which might represent performing surgery or administering a curative. GMs, you choose whether this is a Short or Long Task, and you determine whether the injured character can treat their own wounds.

If you wish to try to fight through the pain—or simply shrug it off—you must overcome a Resolve Short Task. The benefit of this fortitude is short-lived, however, typically ending at the conclusion of the Scene.

Once a character suffers Injury 5, whether from one or multiple unresolved Injuries, the character is **defeated**. While defeated, they can't act. If they're not stabilized within a couple minutes, they'll **die**. GMs, you can often make Injury 5 have permanent (although less punishing) effects.

For example, if a character sustains Injury 5 to their arm, they might lose the arm, meaning they might lose Permission to attempt two-handed Tasks, or might always roll with Threshold with anything impeded by having only one arm.

---

Characters sustain **Injuries** when they're hurt in combat or fail a potentially dangerous Task. Injuries hinder the character, such as by increasing Difficulty, Threshold, or even blocking Permission to attempt certain actions and Tasks. If a character reaches **Injury 5**, they are **defeated** and might die.

---

# ADVANTAGE

---

If you are attempting a Task under favorable circumstances—such as with the help of an ally, a useful piece of equipment, or an especially appropriate method—the GM can grant you **Advantage** to your roll.

The better your character has stacked the odds in their favor, the more **Advantage Dice (AD)** the GM will grant. A typical source of Advantage grants +1AD, but each source can provide as much as +3AD. However, multiple sources of Advantage can add no more than +5AD to a roll.

For example, a character exploring a region of ruins would be granted +1AD when they refer to a highly detailed map made by another company of scavengers. If the character was being guided by an experienced scavenger who knew the area well, that could give up to +3AD.

Characters often gain AD from their equipment, as discussed in **Equipment** (page 77).

---

Characters can gain **Advantage** when attempting a Task in favorable circumstances—such as with great positioning, the proper tool, or help from an ally. A source of Advantage can grant up to **3 Advantage Dice**, and a Task roll can gain up to a total of **5 Advantage Dice** from all sources of Advantage.

---

# APPROACHES

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Most problems within the gut of the Beast can be solved in numerous ways—diplomacy, stealth, straight-out violence, or tactical cunning. As such, a Task's Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold (DST) can vary greatly based on the scavengers' **Approach** to the obstacle.

Generally, you'll take different Approaches by using different Skills. If your character is trying to gain access to a stronghold, they might try to sneak their way in (Stealth), bash the door down (Might), convince the guards to allow entry (Influence), or create some calamity that forces the gates open (Cunning or Lore). In each of these cases, the GM might assign the Task a different Difficulty and reactions. Sometimes, however, your Approach to the Task—even within the same Skill—can modify its DST.

Just like with Tasks, your Approach in combating Enemies can change their DST. For example, a rival scavenger might have a much higher Difficulty against intimidation than against bribery, even though both might be considered an Influence Task.

Once you choose an Approach, though, you're not locked in for the whole Scene. If you realize an Enemy's weakness or a better way to overcome a Task, you can change your Approach. GMs, you can reflect the shift by altering the Task or Enemy's DST.

Likewise, you might come up with such a clever Approach for a Task that you circumvent part or all of it. Kidnapping the reaver captain's only son might make the upcoming negotiation Task a moot point, as he'll do anything to keep his son alive.

---

The way a scavenger or company **Approaches** a Task can change its Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold (DST). An especially clever Approach to a Task will prompt a lower DST than an especially foolish one.

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# INSTINCT DICE

---

On any roll, you can spend up to **5 Instinct Dice (ID)** from your Instinct pool, removing them from the pool, to add dice in equal number to your roll. You accrue ID in your Instinct pool by **acting instinctively**: acting in a way that demonstrates your character's natural impulses.

As a scavenger, you also gain ID when you:

1. discover clues that lead to a valuable haul
2. complete a pull of something valuable
3. barter your haul for a profit

Each time your character acts instinctively, the GM will reward you 2–5 ID. Each clue is worth about 1 ID, while completing pulls and bartering hauls can be worth upwards of 5 or even 10 ID, depending on the haul's value and rarity.

Though your character's actions throughout a Scene will earn you ID, you won't add the earned ID to your Instinct pool until the Scene's Conclusion Phase.

# EXAMPLE INSTINCTIVE ACTIONS

## CURIOSITY

Exploring deeper despite danger, pressing on to learn the *why* of an item, attitude, or opinion, seeking knowledge or understanding, attempting to learn secrets or hidden treasures, initiating actions—even dangerous ones—simply to see what happens.

## FEAR

Turning back in the face of danger, hiding or avoiding conflict, taking a longer but safer route, cutting your losses in order to escape, fleeing or surrendering in combat, operating under coercion or intimidation, abandoning or betraying others for self-preservation.

## GREED

Seeking out the most lucrative or rewarding actions and pulls, working only for the promise of recompense, behaving selfishly, consuming excessively, seeking hedonic pleasure, making unfair demands, or acting only in self-interest.

## LOYALTY

Protecting your closest comrades or kin, acting in the interest of your company or stronghold or people, engaging in collectivism or prejudice toward a group to which you're not loyal, keeping oaths and promises, seeking out justice or vengeance against those who have harmed the ones you care about.

## VIOLENCE

Solving problems with violence or coercion, engaging in bloodlust and battle, starting unnecessary fights, seeking out combat or the thrill of the hunt, training to be a better combatant or honing your skills as a killer, seeking glory or respect through martial prowess, instilling fear in others from the threat of your violence, or besting others in feats of strength or cunning.

---

You can spend up to **5 Instinct Dice (ID)** from your Instinct pool to add dice in equal number to your roll.

---

You earn Instinct Dice when your character acts instinctively—in alignment with one (or both) of their two Instincts: Curiosity, Fear, Greed, Loyalty, and Violence.

---

Earned ID are added to the Instinct pool in a Scene's Conclusion Phase.

---



# SUCCUMBING AND TRANSCENDING

---

At pivotal points in any tale, characters can take actions with enormous gravity, actions that irrevocably change the story's course.

In **Belly of the Beast**, these actions are bound to your character's Instincts. At any time during play, you may have your character **Succumb** to or **Transcend** one of their Instincts.

## SUCCUMBING TO YOUR INSTINCTS

Your grace, sentience, and ability to compromise melt away with the surge of feral instinct overwhelming your every thought and action. You embody one of your two Instincts, behaving as a paragon of its most basic and fundamental form.

When you **Succumb**, you temporarily lose control of your character, and the GM describes how your character, through their animalistic action, overcomes the current Task or Scene. You don't need to roll or spend ID to Succumb—it just happens.

Once this action resolves, you regain control of your character. However, when the Scene ends, your character becomes **Ashamed**, and you cannot Advance until you have atoned for your actions.

GMs, discuss with the player of the Succumbing character about what you both find to be fitting, primal actions. Tailor the action not only to the character and the Instinct they are Succumbing to, but also to your game's tone, current pace, and narrative arc.

For example, a character that Succumbs to Violence would become a monstrous killer, slaked in bloodlust and overwhelmed by the primal need to kill everything in sight. They might kill their enemies, but also hurt or endanger their allies. Their actions might be so distasteful or terrifying that their comrades no longer wish to be around them, either out of disgust or fear.

# TRANSCEND YOUR INSTINCTS

You've managed to restrain your base desires, control your thoughts and actions, and reach a place of spiritual and mental enlightenment few of your fellow survivors will ever understand or appreciate.

When you **Transcend**, you completely forgo one of your two Instincts to overcome the current Task or Scene. As with Succumbing, you and the GM will work together to describe the details of how this occurs, but you don't need to roll or spend ID.

Once you Transcend an Instinct, it ceases to be part of your character—you don't gain ID when acting instinctively for this Instinct, and you can't use its Instinct Maneuver. To acquire a new Instinct or restore your Transcended Instinct, you must Advance. GMs, you can disallow a character from gaining certain Instincts, typically those from which they have Transcended, if it makes sense in the story.

For example, a character Transcends from Loyalty, seeing that tribalism and the narrow focus of clan and kin is stifling the growth of the Swallowed society. Casting aside such closed-minded Loyalty, the character brokers a truce between several warring factions, who now cautiously work together.

At any time befitting the narrative, a character can **Succumb** to or **Transcend** from one of their Instincts. In doing so, they overcome the Task or Scene without rolling or spending Instinct dice.

---

If you **Succumb** to an Instinct, you temporarily lose control of your character, and the GM narrates how your character resolves the Task or Scene as instinctively as possible. At the Scene's conclusion, your character becomes **Ashamed**.

---

If you **Transcend** from an Instinct, your character is no longer connected to or impacted by that Instinct, and resolves the Task or Scene in an antithetical way. This Instinct no longer generates Instinct Dice, and its Instinct Maneuver cannot be used.

---

# COMBAT AND ENEMIES

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Combat is simply a Scene that has Enemies in it, along with any Tasks. **Enemies** are just like Tasks—with a DST. Remember, only players roll; the GM doesn't.

You can **attack** an Enemy by rolling the relevant Skill:

- Coordination for ranged attacks (bows)
- Might for melee attacks (swords)
- Influence for mental attacks (intimidation)

Treat your attack like a Long Task. Any successes you roll reduce the Enemy's Difficulty. For example, rolling an attack with 2 successes against a Difficulty 4 Enemy makes them a Difficulty 2 Enemy.

You **defend** against Enemy attacks by rolling the relevant Skill:

- Awareness or Coordination to **Dodge** attacks
- Might to **Block** attacks
- Resolve to **Resist** mental or internal attacks

If you defend and roll successes equal to or greater than the Enemy's Severity, your character avoids sustaining an Injury. If you roll fewer successes than the Enemy's Severity, your character sustains an Injury, whose Severity is the difference between the Enemy's Severity and the number of rolled successes.

For example, a player rolls Might to Block an Enemy's spear thrust. They get 2 successes on their Block, compared to the Enemy's Severity 3. The character takes Injury 1 as they're hit by the Enemy's spear ( $3 - 2 = 1$ ).

Additionally, if you attack or defend and roll 0 successes, you can suffer **Consequences** in addition to any Injuries. Consequences in combat might include breaking equipment, getting into a disadvantaged position, or triggering additional attacks from enemies.

---

Characters **attack** the enemy's **Difficulty**, which is treated like a **Long Task**. Characters **defend** against an enemy's **Severity**, with each attack treated as a **Short Task**. On a failure, the defender takes an **Injury**, whose Severity is the margin of failure.

---

Sometimes an Enemy will want to act but not attack—they might try to sneak by the characters, deceive them, or flee the scene. If the characters don't take any action to oppose this, the GM can assume the enemy succeeds or fails as befitting the narrative and their skillset.

However, if a scavenger does oppose such an action, the player rolls against the Enemy just like a Task, considering their DST.

Such Tasks can create Consequences or Complications, but these typically just mean that the Enemy acted more quickly or with greater success, rather than something else bad happening on its own.

Sometimes these Tasks can modify the Enemy's DST or the DSTs of other Enemies or Tasks. For example, an enemy that is sneaking up on a character that has rolled an Awareness against, but failed, means that the character hasn't yet detected the Enemy, and any of the Enemy's attacks will have a much higher Severity.

# ENEMY EQUIPMENT

By default, an Enemy's equipment is factored into their DST. GMs, you don't need to create lots of details about an Enemy's equipment, but you can use it for inspiration when determining their approach to attacking or defending, as well as the interplay of certain weapons and armors, raising or lowering the Enemy's DST.

Otherwise, an Enemy's equipment can give cues for which types of Injuries the characters might sustain when on the receiving end of the Enemy's attacks—hammers might break bones, while swords can cause bleeding, and so forth.

# DETAILING ENEMIES

The vast majority of Enemies the scavengers will encounter will be pretty simple: Difficulty 1, Severity 1, Threshold 0. Some might even be simpler than that, collecting an entire group of fodder into one mob with Difficulty 1, Severity 1, Threshold 0.

However, some Enemies demand to be made more unique, not only to show their importance in the narrative, but also to represent their training, expertise, and approach to conflict.

GMs, the simplest way to do this is to set the Enemy's DST for each Approach they might take, or for each Approach the characters might take against the Enemy.

For example, an assassin might be a D1/S1/T0 in straight-up, exposed combat, but could be D2/S4/T1 when fighting from stealth or in darkness. And transversely, a pit fighter could be D5/S3/T1 when fighting in gladiatorial combat, but only serve up a D2/S1/T0 challenge when fighting in a dark ruin.

There's much more information about constructing Enemies in **Creating NPCs** (page 173).

## ORDER OF ACTION

Determining when everyone acts in combat is called the **order of action**. Simply put, the order of action is whatever makes the most sense in the moment. The aggressor tends to attack first, and most large battles are messy enough that order doesn't matter a whole lot.

That said, players, if you want to act before an Enemy, such as by drawing a sword to defend yourselves from a surprise attack, you can roll a Short Task, generally with Awareness or Cunning, against the Enemy's DST, accounting for their speed and other advantages.



Equipment and weaponry that is better suited to the fight—including the weapon’s reach, its draw speed, its readiness, and the battlefield’s shape and density—can give you +AD. In an Enemy’s hands, such equipment can give +Difficulty.

Combat is broken up into **rounds**, each a complete cycle of all of the combatants’ **turns**. Each character gets one turn per round.

On each turn, the acting character can take one **action**: rolling for a Task or against an Enemy. The combatants also get **reactions**, the things they do in response to other combatants’ actions, such as defending against attacks and rolling for order of action. There is no limit to reactions.

GMs, make sure that every enemy gets a turn each round—either after the characters have gone, or interspersed as the narrative demands. There’s more advice on this in **VI: Game Mastering**.

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The combatants’ **order of action** depends on the narrative and the situation in the moment. Combat is broken up into **rounds**, consisting of each combatant’s **turn**, itself broken up into **actions** and **reactions**. On their turn, a character gets one action and any number of reactions, such as defending.

---

# RANGE

Arguably the two most decisive factors in battle are the combatant's effective range and position. If a force can attack an enemy at a range they can't counterattack from, the advantaged force will likely win the engagement. Similarly, a scavenger with a spear is likely to stab a reaver in the gut before he can bring his axe down in a lethal strike.

Combat can operate at one of several **ranges**, from closest to farthest: Hand, Arm, Reach, Near, and Far.

Most combat in **Belly of the Beast** will be melee—that is, Hand to Reach range. This is largely because of the Belly's landscape: its innumerable passageways and omnipresent darkness make seeing a distant target very difficult.

## HAND

When two combatants are within the width of a hand apart, are grappling, or are in tightly confined spaces. Daggers and shields excel at this range.

## ARM

When two combatants are within the length of an arm apart, are engaged in non-polearm melee combat, or are in close combat but open quarters. Swords and axes excel at this range.

## REACH

When two combatants are within three paces of each other, are engaged in polearm melee combat, or are in a small but open arena. Spears and polearms excel at this range.

## NEAR

When two combatants are within ten paces of each other, are engaged in throwing or very close ranged combat, or are in a moderately sized and open arena. Thrown weapons excel at this range.

## FAR

When two combatants are farther than ten paces apart, are engaged in long-distance ranged combat, or are in a very open and broad battlefield. Bows and crossbows excel at this range.

# MOVEMENT

In a typical small battlefield, the characters can move about freely. Tracking movement isn't necessary, since everyone can get to whatever position and range they'd like. If there's a conflict, GMs, you can prompt Tasks or just decide who gets where. If a particular Enemy is a trained combatant and possesses a weapon well suited to a particular range, the GM can increase their DST when fighting at that range.

# COMBAT AS SHORT TASKS

Scavengers—and the people they’re fighting—are rarely masters of combat. Sometimes it makes more sense to sum up a bloody engagement by having each participating player roll one Short Task to determine who wins and loses, and what the damage is. In this case, GMs, give each Task a DST bearing in mind the character’s Approach and what they’re up against.

Players, if you roll insufficient successes to overcome the Task, your character traded blows but came out victorious. If you roll 0 successes, your character lost the combat and likely sustained Injuries. Of course, overcoming the Task means they won handily.

GMs, you can use this technique to make nail-bitingly close combats shorter and more visceral, shoving characters out of the way of engaging in long and drawn out bloody battles. Use your best judgment for when to use it; don’t overdo it or else combat can become boring, repetitive, or too random.

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**Enemies** are treated just like Tasks—with their own DST, modified by their equipment and Approaches. Enemies can join together into a single group, represented like a Long Task or Scene Difficulty, or be made more granular, with each Skill or Approach warranting its own DST.

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There are multiple **ranges** that define what type of attacks are relevant or appropriate, as well as give Advantage to combatants using certain weapons or Approaches.

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Combatants can move about the battlefield freely, unless the GM thinks moving from one place to another takes more time or requires a Task.

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# HORROR AND SICKNESS

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Scavengers face the lethal threats of **Horror** and **Sickness** on a daily basis. Briefly: Horror is treated as a Short Task, while Sickness is treated as an Enemy.

## HORROR

While everyone—even the bravest scavengers—feels fear, true **Horror** can overwhelm the senses and cripple the stoutest will.

When your character is confronted with something truly horrifying—such as a graphic part of the Beast’s digestive system, a cannibals’ feast, or a group of bloodslicked reavers charging over a hill—they very well might be overcome with Horror.

To try to remain steadfast against Horror, you’ll roll a **Resolve Short Task**. Injuries or Consequence from a failed Horror Task range from hesitation (Severity 1), to impeded combat prowess (Severity 2–3), all the way to full-body paralysis or uncontrollable flight (Severity 4–5).

# SICKNESS

Sickness is handled like an Enemy (page 101). When your character is confronted with Sickness, roll a Short Task—either with Resolve (immune system fighting it off) or Lore (knowing how to treat it)—against the Sickness Severity. If you fail, suffer an Injury with a Severity equal to your margin of failure.

Once you reduce the Sickness Difficulty to 0, your character is cured. Injuries sustained during this process remain, however, and some of their effects can be permanent, just like Injuries sustained in combat.

Alchemy and various concoctions stewed from the many foul things living within the Belly serve as hit-or-miss treatments for the innumerable ailments that fester within the Swallowed Folk.

The most common of these illnesses is **bilelung**, sustained from breathing in the constantly toxic fumes within the belly of the Beast. Various vapors, smokes, and liquids can treat the symptoms of bilelung—coughing up blood, extreme discomfort, fluid filling the lungs, and eventually death—but most know that if they live to their fourth or fifth decade, bilelung's the way they're likely to go.



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Characters can become stricken with **Horror** in truly horrific or grotesque situations, as the GM sees fit. To avoid its effects, roll a Resolve Short Task; its Consequences that can involve mental Injuries up to full panic.

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Similarly, scavengers can fall to **Sickness**, which is treated like an Enemy. Roll a Resolve or Lore Short Task.

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# FRENZY MADNESS

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No one who's survived long in the Belly has abstained completely from consuming **Beast flesh** and **Beast blood**. It is a simple and unavoidable fact of life in the Evergut: you do what you must to survive, and sometimes that means succumbing to eating the foul essence of the Belly itself.

Sustained and consistent consumption of the Beast's byproducts—specifically, chunks of its meat and pots of its blood—slowly corrupts the mind, removing one's higher cognizance, inhibitions, and civility. In essence, the more one imbibes, the more feral and beast-like one becomes. This malady is known as **frenzy madness**.

If your scavenger eats or drinks some of the Beast's viscera, nothing will happen immediately. However, if your character does so more than once or twice in a session, the GM can force you to roll Resolve to defend against the madness's attack, essentially treated like a Sickness or Enemy. The more flesh your character consumes, the higher the madness's Severity.

If you fail the Resolve Task, your character takes **Injury (madness)** with Severity equal to your margin of failure against the Task Severity. For example, if Katarod rolled 2 successes with Resolve against the Severity 3 madness attack, he would sustain Injury (madness) 1.

Once your character sustains **Injury (madness) 5**, they succumb completely to the frenzy, and you permanently lose control of them. For all intents and purposes, their consciousness is gone and they are little more than a rabid animal.

Healing techniques, consuming "clean" water and food, expelling the Beast's viscera from the system, and simply rest can reduce the madness (per GM discretion). You're encouraged to roleplay your character's descent into ferality as their mind draws deeper into the frenzy.

# EQUIPMENT

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There are two types of equipment: **combat equipment** (weapons, armor, shields) and **noncombat equipment** (tools, alchemy, gear). Equipment used in relevant situations grants Permission and Advantage based upon its **Descriptors**.

Descriptors are simple words or phrases that describe how equipment behaves and what can happen during ideal circumstances, or what can be suffered due to **Consequences**.

Broad categories of equipment (such as swords or shields) use the same Descriptors, but more specific pieces of equipment can have more (and more granular) Descriptors. Below are some broad categories of equipment with their Descriptors.

## ARMOR

- **Permission:** May Resist (roll Resolve) melee or ranged attacks rather than Block or Dodge
- **Advantage:** When defending against ineffective weapon type (such as a sword against plate)
- **Special:** Armor can reduce an incoming Injury by 1 Severity, if the armor would sensibly protect against this type of Injury

## SHIELDS

- **Permission:** May Block (roll Might) ranged attacks rather than Dodge
- **Advantage:** When Blocking, disarming, or pushing
- **Special:** Shields can be **sacrificed** without GM permission, preventing an Injury from an attack

## BOWS, CROSSBOWS, AND THROWN WEAPONS

- **Permission:** May make ranged attacks
- **Advantage:** When attacking at Near or Far range, disabling enemy movement, hitting precise targets

## SPEARS, POLEARMS, AND LANCES

- **Permission:** May make melee attacks at Reach range, penetrate enemy armor
- **Advantage:** When attacking in Reach range, tripping, puncturing, or moving enemies

## SWORDS, AXES, AND MACES

- **Permission:** May attack armored opponents
- **Advantage:** When attacking in Arm range, disarming, Blocking, and counter-attacks

## DAGGERS AND SMALL WEAPONS

- **Permission:** May attack armored opponents
- **Advantage:** When attacking in close range, stealth, concealment, grappling

## TOOLS, KITS, AND NONCOMBAT GEAR

- **Permission:** May attempt Tasks that would be impossible without the proper equipment
- **Advantage:** When attempting Tasks that relate to the equipment's designed function

## VISIBLE WEALTH, JEWELRY, AND TOTEMS

- **Permission:** May gain access to conversations, regions, or strongholds that would otherwise be unavailable
- **Advantage:** When leveraging your apparent wealth or power through Influence Tasks or similar negotiations

## ALCHEMY

- **Permission:** May gain temporary effects from its use or consumption
- **Examples:**
  - +1AD to attack, can't roll Awareness
  - +1AD to Resist, can't roll Coordination
  - Delay Injury 1, can't roll Cunning
  - See in darkness, sustain Injury 1
  - +1AD to Awareness, sustain Injury 1
  - Ignore Horror, can't roll Lore
  - Remove Sickness, can't roll Might

All alchemical mixtures have both positive and negative effects, as determined by the GM or the player creating the alchemical compound. In general, it should logically follow what the compound is made from, and how the character consumes it.

Most alchemy effects last until the end of the Scene, though some compounds—such as the example with the effect of remove Sickness, can't roll Might—might last for several hours or even days.

Generally, the more powerful the alchemical remedy, the shorter its duration of effect, both positive and negative.

# CROWBARS

The single most common, and arguably most important, piece of equipment in any scavenger's kit is the crowbar. Some people call them **trotterwrenches** because they resemble a pig's foot, but the good old-fashioned iron lever with a hook on the end is ubiquitous in packs and harnesses throughout the Evergut.

The crowbar has endless uses and applications: weapon, lever, wrench, brace, splint, bartering tool, sparker, ramrod, jammer, on and on. Many scavengers develop a personal attachment to their crowbar, etching in decorations, giving them names, and thinking it an ill omen if the device must be sacrificed or lost to the Belly.

Mechanically, they can serve as melee weapons (like swords, axes, maces) or tools in the equipment list earlier.





# CARRYING EQUIPMENT

Scavengers are always looking for the most efficient way to carry the tools and gear they need, but leave plenty of room for their valuable hauls. Carrying equipment isn't only a matter of weight, but also bulk and awkwardness. Carrying a longspear might be worth carrying into battle—however, it's a long, cumbersome stick that'll snag and smack on just about anything you encounter as a scavenger.

Because of this, scavenger equipment is designed to be as compact and light as possible. Those in your profession favor shorter and lighter weapons that can be both safely tucked away and grabbed using a single hand with precision and alacrity. Knives, hatchets, bows, and javelins are the most prolific.

## BACK

Most packs, haversacks, and out-of-the-way mobile storage are held on your back. You can fit a good amount of material on your back and still function absolutely normally.

Items and containers placed on your back **can't** be accessed quickly, but don't impede your movement or combat in any way. Pulling items from your back takes an action in combat, or a few seconds outside of combat, leaving you vulnerable while doing so.

## CHEST

Harnesses, vests, and slings often attach to your chest. You can't carry anything bulkier than small containers—map scrolls, daggers, alchemical vials, and such—but you can carry a lot of them.

Items and containers placed on your chest **can** be accessed quickly, such as amid combat. Doing so doesn't consume an action.

## LEGS

Smaller straps, soft packs, and thin containers can be mounted to the calves and thighs, largely to store weapons or tools, utility belts, and sheathes.

Your legs can hold a couple of small and light items, which you can access quickly and easily. Doing so doesn't consume an action.

## HANDS

Once your back, chest, and legs are full of equipment—not counting what you can wear, such as armor—you only have your two hands to carry things.

For each hand you're using to carry an item, even a small one, you suffer **+1 Threshold** on any **noncombat** Tasks related to that hand, doing so **denies Permission** to do anything that **requires** two hands.

So, carrying a two-handed weapon, or a one-handed weapon and shield, precludes actions that require both hands (like climbing), and adds +1 Threshold to actions that require only one hand (like pulling a rope).

You can only hold one thing in each hand, so you couldn't hold a shield and a knife in the same hand, barring some exceptions that the GM might find reasonable.

## ENCUMBERED

You are **encumbered** when you're carrying anything that is:

1. heavy enough to require a Might roll to lift and carry, or
2. long, bulky, or awkward, or
3. requires more than one person to carry.

While encumbered, all Tasks (including mental ones) you attempt increase in DST: generally +1 to +3 Threshold, based on how straining the items are to carry. If you're wearing or carrying so much gear that it could become tangled on the environment—such as straps, belts, and odd-shaped items—the GM can have your equipment attack itself, as an Enemy would, dealing **break damage** (page 126).

These encumbrance rules aren't meant to be particularly granular or specific, but rather to help force the characters into difficult decisions. Do they want to carry an extra sword just in case, or do they want to be able to carry another five pounds of loot?

# SACRIFICING EQUIPMENT

If your character would gain Consequences or Injuries, you can avoid them by **sacrificing** a relevant piece of equipment, destroying it.

For example, you might roll to defend and fail, so the GM gives your character Consequences and Injury 2. To avoid the Injury, you might sacrifice your character's breastplate. However, the breastplate is now destroyed, so your character no longer gains its benefits.

At other times, you can sacrifice a piece of equipment to automatically overcome a Task. You might sacrifice a dagger by sticking it into a door's mechanism, or sacrifice a rucksack by hurtling it at and knocking an enemy off of a ledge.

Sacrificing equipment is highly interpretive and must make logical sense in the story. If you want to sacrifice equipment, discuss it with the group and GM. Ultimately, it is up to the GM to make the final call.

# BREAKING EQUIPMENT

Sometimes equipment breaks. Nearly every piece of gear in the Belly has been salvaged or scavenged, partially rotten or rusted solid, reforged and rebroken half a dozen times. As such, equipment is fragile and easily falls apart.

Any time that a piece of equipment is used in a Task, it might break. A sword during an attack, a shield during a Block, a climbing kit while rappelling into a pit—all susceptible to their own fragility and the constant, noxious, decaying fumes of the Beast's stomach.

Whenever you get a Consequence or Complication, the GM may break a piece of equipment you used in the Task. It might be the whole Consequence or Complication if it has Severity 1, or part of it if it has a higher Severity.

Especially **sturdy** equipment can bear **break damage** before breaking. A Consequence or Complication deals break damage equal to its Severity. Break damage can be accumulated and repaired.

For example, a mace with **sturdy 3** would break only when it's taken **3 break damage**. A simple Consequence with Severity 1 would not be sufficient, but it would reduce the mace to sturdy 2. With repair, it could potentially be restored to sturdy 3.

# CRAFTING EQUIPMENT

It's natural to be both a scavenger and a smith—you have access to vast amounts of raw materials at your disposal, and if you can convert the often unusable scrap into something valuable, you stand to make considerable gains.

If you want to craft something, you'll need all of the base materials or ingredients, the proper tools, and a suitable work environment such as a workbench, smelter, and forge. Whether you have all you need is the GM's call (and what makes sense in the narrative).

Making items from scratch is generally a Long Task. Complications could mean lost materials or an inferior product, and Consequences could cause a complete wreck or more severe ramifications—your shop burning down, for example.

Crafting an item takes days, about equal in number to the Task's Difficulty. For example, a Difficulty 3 Long Task to forge a sword would take three days.

Repairing or reworking an item, whether broken or not, is a Short Task.





# VALUE AND BARTER

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Scavengers spend a lot of their time haggling, bartering, and ascertaining the value of their salvaged goods. The economy—if you can even call it that—in the Belly is incredibly mercurial and chaotic, based upon the immediate and often desperate needs of the traders.

In short, the value of an item is what someone is willing to trade for it. Each trader will have different needs at different times, and so will value goods uniquely. However, some things are in far greater abundance within the Belly than others, which creates a baseline of worth.

Things that are *useful* are generally far more valuable than things that are *decorative*. A block of untarnished iron would be much more valuable than a similar block of gold. Even though the gold could be plated onto other things, its softness makes it almost useless in making weapons, tools, or containers.



The *most valuable* things, though, are durable, nonperishable, and practical—watertight containers, weapons, bolts of fabric, tools, potted plants and tubers, and especially fertile **hogs**. Though many hogs are butchered and eaten in the Belly, the vast majority provide far greater value through their blood and milk, commonly mixed to make **bloodbutter**, as well their sucklings.

Perishable goods are the next most valued—things like clean water, grains, dried food, smoked meats, and alchemical components. These items are common in certain areas, and all but scant in others.

While the majority of merchants and traders in the Belly prefer to barter, scavengers have to pack and travel light. As such, gold and silver coins minted by the swallowed nations have recently become an acceptable form of currency between scavengers or well-established strongholds. Other goods that are compact but valuable—fine leathers, bolts of good fabric, and forged weapons—can also serve as reliable trade fodder.

Many scavengers prefer to work out of a single area or in conjunction with a nomadic group. This way they can buy a stake in the stronghold, investing their hard-fought earnings in their own structures, comforts, hogs, and potted plants.

When dealing with goods in larger quantities or worth higher values, most traders refer to things in terms of **hogpounds**: literally how many pounds of a living pig the items are worth. For example, one pound of good bronze is worth several hogpounds—several pounds of a live hog—while a pinch of good alchemical components might be worth many dozens of hogpounds.

## WEALTH (OPTIONAL)

Some players tend to track their wealth down to every knickknack and rusty ingot. If your group is amenable to such bookkeeping, go for it—it certainly adds a lot of immersion and flavor, as your characters undoubtedly are counting every nugget.

If, however, such minutia bores your group—or if your characters accumulate so much stuff that it becomes too difficult to track—you may condense everything into an abstract measure of **Wealth**.

The more stuff you've acquired, the higher your **Wealth Rank**:

| Wealth Rank | Success On |
|-------------|------------|
| Poor        | 6          |
| Typical     | 5+         |
| Comfortable | 4+         |
| Rich        | 3+         |

When you go to barter, haggle, or otherwise buy goods from someone, you'll roll a Short Task with Wealth to see if you can afford and acquire it. Remember, Wealth is purely an abstraction used to expedite gameplay: if the GM says so, you can just get what you need without rolling.

A Wealth Task works just like any other Task, and it usually has D1/S0/T0. You might gain Advantage Dice from possessing the Trader Specialty, having overcome an Influence Task, or having other circumstantial benefits such as favors, kinship, or the promise of completing a job. Often, Wealth Tasks won't give Complications or Consequences, but a crafty GM might come up with some.

You can only roll a Wealth Task **once** for a particular set of needs—whether “supplies for a journey” or “a silver spoon”—until circumstances change or you upgrade your Wealth Rank.

You won't always need to roll to get what you want, though. Listed below, you'll find some examples of goods at each Wealth Rank that your scavenger will be able to barter for without you rolling a Wealth Task. This assumes that the seller has access to these items, and that your character can leverage their source of Wealth, such as when trading within an established stronghold.

**Poor:** Low-quality food, broken items, useless trinkets, fragments and pieces of fabric or leather, rotten or long-dead hogmeat, and similar things that a well-off stronghold would consider trash or not worth the weight to transport.

**Typical:** Everything above, basic food, simple containers, Evergut-made items such as clay pottery or bone tools, simple raw materials such as uncured leather or wool, fresh meat and the occasional starch or fungus or insect.

**Comfortable:** Everything above, good food, sturdy containers, well-made items from skilled Swallowed, the occasional metal tool, bone or lamellar armor, live sucklings or the occasional potted plant.

**Rich:** Everything above, hearty food, well-sealed and sturdy containers, Eaten Age basic items, well-forged metal tools and simple weapons (axes, maces, spears, arrows), small amounts of high-quality raw materials such as alchemical ingredients, cured leather, iron ingots, as well as hogs and fresh tubers or vegetables.

A new scavenger starts with a **Poor** or **Typical** Wealth Rank, unless your game concept would suggest otherwise. GMs, you'll reason when a character or the group has earned enough barter to increase their Wealth Rank, but a good starting point is when they make three pulls, each more profitable than the last—the same as earning an Advance.

For example, Katarod has returned to Nillox with a valuable haul, and the GM reasons that he has gathered enough supplies to bump his Wealth Rank from Typical to Comfortable. Katarod wants to go and speak to the stronghold's alchemist to buy some ingredients and concoctions.

Rather than discuss this transaction in-character—rolling Influence, using the Trader Specialty, and bartering physical items that his player has tracked—Katarod's player opts to simply roll a Wealth Task. Since his Wealth Rank is now Comfortable, he needs to roll a 4 or better. And since he has the Trader Specialty, he gets to add +1AD to his roll.

Katarod's player rolls two dice: a 1 and a 4, granting him **1 success**—all that he needs to buy the alchemical remedies. If he didn't roll a success, the alchemist wouldn't agree to the terms, or Katarod wouldn't be able to cover the price.

If you **fail** on a Wealth Task, you may decrease your Wealth by one Skill Rank to treat the roll as a success. You cannot lower your Skill Rank below Poor, and reducing your Wealth must feasibly pay for what you want. For example, Katarod with Comfortable Wealth couldn't buy a full suit of plate armor, regardless of how much of his Wealth he gave away.

# FAVORS

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Sometimes there's just no better way to negotiate a trade than to exchange favors. Maybe you don't have anything tangible that they want, or maybe they have a skillset that's more useful to you than any physical wealth. In any case, the PCs will often earn **favors** from NPCs and vice versa.

While many strongholds and NPCs won't want to deal in favors with scavengers they don't yet trust, those that your company is involved with most frequently might shift from bartering to exchanging favors.

Favors come in three **tiers**: minor, moderate, and major.

## MINOR

Something small or unimportant, a few hogpounds worth of value, a simple errand, or some information that is helpful but not dangerous or secret.

## MODERATE

The most common type of favor, one which assumes both parties have something to gain and something to lose. They'll help you out of a dangerous spot, serve as backup in a fight, or give you some much-needed resources to stave off death or mayhem.

## MAJOR

Only the most critical and significant favors—someone owes you an enormous debt. They'll stand beside you in a highly dangerous battle, give up their last rations, even sacrifice themselves for you.

# CALLING IN FAVORS

You can **call in a favor** that's owed to you, and can expect the payoff as long as it's possible. If the company is stuck leagues away from the nearest stronghold, though, there'd be no way to communicate back to the stronghold's smith who owes a favor.

If you're calling in a favor outside of a Scene, you and the GM can briefly discuss the parameters of the favor (in or out of character) and move on with the narrative. You don't need to roll, and you'll get the favor soon enough.

If you're calling in a favor during a Scene, the favor can provide +AD, lower a Task's DST, or give you some kind of tangible assistance—reinforcements, better equipment, and such.

Once you call in a favor, it's spent. Whoever owed you the favor doesn't owe you anything anymore.

A minor favor will be repaid at the NPC's convenience—usually a few days or more. A moderate favor will elicit a response or action pretty quickly, generally as soon as it is painlessly feasible for the NPC. A major favor will trigger an immediate and significant response from the NPC, even if they're otherwise engaged.

Remember, the only way an NPC can know if a favor is being called in is if they're told such—and then plausibly be able to actually accommodate the ask. Sometimes the NPC and characters might negotiate the terms of the favor, and a Task might come up. Someone with the Conspirator Specialty, however, can skip the negotiations.

## OWING FAVORS

Sometimes you'll make an exchange for something and **owe** a favor to an NPC. GMs, you'll want to call in these favors at inopportune and painful times: give the scavenger a tough choice between doing whatever the NPC asks and risking their reputation by ignoring the request.



If an NPC calls in a favor, and you **reject** the call, you'll then owe that NPC another favor of the same tier, or your existing favor will escalate by one tier. If you reject the same NPC three times, that NPC will hold a **grudge** against you.

NPCs with grudges are dangerous—they can affect how other NPCs treat you and those you're affiliated with, even to the other PC scavengers or their friends. The grudge's nature and manifestation depend entirely on the personality of the NPC (including their Who, What, and Approach) and on the tiers of the favors rejected.

If you reject an NPC's favor, you can try to **reduce the sting** by attempting an Influence Short Task with a Difficulty generally equal to the favor's tier. If you overcome the Task, the rejection doesn't count toward the NPC holding a grudge. If you fail, you'll have to face the Consequences of an angry NPC with a grudge.

# BONDS

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Scavengers can form **Bonds** with those closest to them—their family, friends, clan, or members of their company. Each scavenger can only have one Bond at a time, generally with a person (their husband) or place (their home).

Players, you'll want to consider, and discuss with the GM, the circumstances of this Bond and how it came to be. Elaborate backstories aren't necessary, but making it specific and personal will add that much more flavor to your scavenger's life, and make it more visceral and real for you.

Once per session, if you act in a way directly motivated by your character's Bond, or in some way furthers your relationship to the bonded, you earn Instinct Dice, even if it doesn't fulfill an Instinct. These ID are gained in the Conclusion Phase, as normal.

For example, Katarod—despite his callous grumbles—feels deep affection for his brother Hynom. Hynom has an impressive collection of books, and painstakingly cares for their decaying pages back at their stronghold. While out on a pull, Katarod goes out of his way—despite danger and the small chance of success—to retrieve a book lodged beneath a large pile of rocks. Doing this doesn't fall within his Instincts (the book's not inherently valuable, nor is he having to kill someone to get it), but it does relate to his **Bond**, so he earns ID.



# VI: Game Mastering

As **Game Master (GM)**, your primary job is to guide the group through making the story and playing the game.

The GM must facilitate the gameplay experience for the players, acting as their source of information and as their interface for their characters to interact with the narrative. Pay special attention to what each player and their character wants, what their Instincts are, and what kind of game concept everyone has agreed to play.

**Belly of the Beast** focuses on scavengers outwitting other dangerous folk in a world so defined by its scarcity and horror that there's no escaping it. Tales of political intrigue or great wars shouldn't be at the forefront of the GM's mind, but rather how this group of gruff survivors can get their next profitable haul and avoid getting eaten by a group of psychotic cannibals.

The GM is there to challenge the characters, to put obstacles in their path, to make them question their Instincts, to make the players feel connected with the world and empathize with the swallowed survivors. You'll frame scenes and throttle the game's pace, you'll define the characters' enemies and their allies, you'll describe what they see and hear and taste and smell, and you'll pull the players' proactive desires to the forefront—all while illustrating this morbid and dark world.

This chapter is a collection of rules and guidelines on how to do just that: how to set Difficulties and define Tasks, how to gauge when to end a Scene and when to call for rolls, and everything else it takes to be a capable and competent GM for **Belly of the Beast**.

One crucial thing to remember: your power as the GM is derived strictly from your players' agreement and consent. If you abuse that power, you'll find that it quickly evaporates.

# CHOOSING A GM

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If you're reading this book, you're likely the one who'll be the GM. That's right, most of the people who get their hands on this little tome will be the ones to pitch the game to their friends. Don't fret if that's the case—being a GM is arguably one of the most rewarding and engaging experiences anyone can have while playing **Belly of the Beast**, or any RPG. (Or even just in life!)

However, if you don't want to be GM, and someone else in your group does, just allow the volunteer to take the helm. It's pretty common for a natural leader or storyteller to want to be the GM, someone who is enamored with the setting or gets a certain satisfaction from seeing the horror on their friends' faces from a particularly gruesome description. That's perfectly fine, and you should let that happen.

But really—just talk it out. Sit down (or hang out online or something) and ask who wants to GM or who the group thinks should GM. If you're tempted, go for it! Volunteer! Once everyone gets used to **Belly of the Beast**, it's common for someone to become the consistent GM.

If all else fails, try a rotating GM. Randomly select someone to be the GM for the first session. Set up a quick couple characters, and start *in media res*, right on the precipice of a pull. If afterwards the GM wants to continue being GM, great; if not, rotate the role to the next player.

# THE GM's ROLE

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The GM takes on many roles before and during play. Generally, your main job is to facilitate the rules and gameplay experience for the players. Sometimes, that means you'll have to be a:

## JUDGE

You'll make decisions, set Difficulties, and determine the outcomes of successes and failures.

## MEDIATOR

Sometimes players will disagree. Your position of authority allows you to serve as an arbitrator. Keep things civil so everyone enjoys the game. Encourage group discussion and democracy if two players can't agree.

## REFEREE

Sometimes players will try to break or manipulate the rules (often unintentionally). You'll need to keep an eye on this and prevent it from happening—or at least bring it up for next time.

## NARRATOR

You're the main source of the players' and characters' information. You'll describe to them the environment, the people, and the actions around the characters.

## CREATOR

The entirety of the Belly isn't detailed in this book, so you'll create all of the details, specific places, and various people that the characters deal with.

## ACTOR

You'll act out and speak in-character for dozens if not hundreds of NPCs, giving them life and personality.

## GUIDE

You'll reveal clues, information, and obstacles to the characters, guiding them through the Belly. However, you're not around to shove them down a predetermined path; let them explore and act as their knowledgeable guide to the world and their surroundings.



# GM PRINCIPLES

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As the GM, you're in a position of authority—respect that, and appreciate the trust that the players have vested in you to serve as the game's custodian and to make it engaging.

You're not the players'—or even the characters'—enemy. Instead, you're their lantern, displaying the interesting people, places, and things living beside them in the Hungry God. You don't want them to fail for failure's sake, but you don't want to protect them from failure either.

Be fair and logical in your decisions. Stay consistent in your approach, and the players will learn and adapt to your style just as you will to theirs.

Admit your mistakes, but don't let them impede or damage gameplay. If you're in the middle of an engaging scene—make a ruling, even if you're not sure it's in the rules. Afterward, say what you would have done differently, and why you made that decision.

Don't give the characters (and more importantly the players) everything they want. This isn't a game about people enjoying their splendid lives; it's about overcoming nearly impossible odds, coming out bloody and filthy on the other side.

Always encourage player creativity. Reward them for being clever and empathizing with their character. Always ask them “yes but how” or “yes but why” rather than simply saying “no.”

Ensure that all players are engaged and that every character has equal time in the spotlight. Some players’ personalities may dominate a conversation—try to bring the quieter people to the forefront, asking them what their characters do, or think, or say.

# GM BASICS

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As GM, you’ll spend most of your time at the table doing three things: describing stuff, making stuff up, and inspiring the players to press on.

## DESCRIPTION

The vast majority of your words will be spent on describing things. Be clear and concise—give the players and their characters the information they need, interspersed with a few brief details.

As the characters wish to more closely examine a certain element in a location, delve more deeply into its description. Capitalize on all of their senses, considering their state of mind, their weariness, and their interests.

A good description is brief and quick, with enough flair to firmly plant an unforgettable image in the players' minds. You want them enticed and wanting more—no need to beat them over the head with paragraphs of prose.

## CREATION

After reading this book, you'll have a sort of nebulous idea of what it's like to live inside of the World Eater. Your mind will contain images that you think are appropriate, and those images will likely be very different from what the characters see. And they won't cover everything. There'll be a lot of blanks, and it's your job to fill them in.

You'll need to think up all of the muck-covered and bloody details of this Swallowed society—how that guy smells and what that woman's teeth look like. You'll create the specifics of the cities, cultures, ruins, adversaries, and everything else the company will encounter.

You get to decide how everything knits together, too. Is there a lake of glowing acid over that next rib in the Belly? Is there a branching series of tubes and caverns leading down into the darker depths? Is there a band of cannibals waiting to ambush the company? You get to create those variables, and decide.

But you don't need to do it alone. If you're stumped, ask questions. Have the players collaborate. Roll on some random tables in the back of this book. Use what you can to keep the narrative moving forward and the players engaged.



# INSPIRATION

Sure, coming up with cool stuff and then describing it in detail is fun for you, but you need to *inspire* the players to care about this horrifying place. They need to feel what their characters feel, compelled to press on in the face of enslavement or death or digestion.

Evoke an emotional, visceral response from them. Make them mad, make them cry, build things for them to care about and then take them away. Always hammer on their Instincts, and make them question their decisions.

# JUDGMENT

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Arguably the most important factor of being a good GM is your judgment. You have a lot of responsibility—taking the actions and intentions of the characters, translating them using the rules, and then judging their outcome.

Since **Belly of the Beast** is relatively light on rules, you'll be doing a lot of judging, making rulings on what happens rather than referring to the book. You can always fall back on the game's core mechanic: set a Difficulty and have the players roll; if they meet or beat it, they succeed, but if not, bad stuff happens.

When making decisions, judge fairly and consistently. Don't harbor any favorites or alter the game to benefit players over others. Understand what the player is trying to accomplish—what their character's true intent is—and make your ruling from that perspective.

While your job isn't to punish players, they should fail, and failure should hurt. But that hurt should complicate matters into a more interesting narrative, it should translate those failures into new opportunities and ways for the players to get engaged.

# CREATING PULLS

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The **pull** is the quintessential quest for any scavenger. The company learns about a region with potentially profitable ruins, they fight through muck and bile and cannibals on their way there, they dig up the interesting bits, and if they find something worth salvaging—they pull it.

A pull can be thought of as a story arc: an interesting journey that culminates in learning more about the Belly, the Eaten Age, and the characters themselves. Pulls provide the framework and the motive behind characters leaving the safety of their strongholds and kinfolk—they're driven by a need to scrounge for the necessities in this sparse and horrible place.

As the GM, one of your main jobs is to prepare these salvaging journeys. In short—the characters should learn about potential pull sites easily and frequently, but getting to those sites is the difficult part. (And bringing the stuff back is even harder!)

First of all, any pull has a **haul**—the loot that's worth salvaging. In the Eaten Age, these things would be little better than junk and bare essentials, but they are now worth their weight in live hog (literally). You can have a lot of fun with this part of the pull—you might give the scavengers rumors of a particularly nice haul in a dangerous location, but also some of a less profitable haul in a safer ruin. In either case, this information might be bad, or another group of scavengers might get there first—the possibilities are endless.



# THE PULL CYCLE

There's a self-sustaining **pull cycle**:

1. problem or scarcity (hook)
2. potential solution (haul)
3. travel to
4. the pull itself
5. travel from
6. solve and barter

GMs, along any of these steps you can introduce any number of obstacles or impediments, twists or developments, battles or environmental hazards.

In short, you should set up two or more potential pulls, lay out a bunch of tools, paths, and levers for the characters to manipulate, and then let them steer the action. Any time something can go wrong, make it so.

Clever scavengers will circumvent obstacles and combat entirely, but sometimes the less clever, more daring scavengers will be the first to arrive at the pull site. Below are some more details on each step of the pull cycle.

## PROBLEM OR SCARCITY

The company discovers or realizes that there's a problem, some kind of scarcity: a stronghold needs more grain, a nomad group has lost all their hogs, the scavengers themselves are out of iron. Something's gone wrong, and it can probably be solved through a good pull.

## POTENTIAL SOLUTION

The scavengers know, assume, or gain information about a place that should have the haul they need to solve the problem. If the group has a pulling ground that they visit frequently, you can introduce new problems and developments as the World Eater shifts, or as those within its innards become more competitive or aware of the company's actions.

In any case, the party knows that there's at least a chance of some items that will solve the problem, and they stand either to earn a healthy profit or to be the champions of the group in trouble. The point of **Belly of the Beast** isn't about investigating where things *might* be profitable and *may be* located—it's more about actually getting it out of there alive.



## TRAVEL TO

This stage is often the longest and when the company will run into the most problems. The dark, dank, and digestive environment alone is dangerous, but this—coupled with reavers or cannibals hunting for scavengers, as well as strongholds or nomads protecting their turf—means the company will have their hands full trying not to die on their way there.

Most scavengers operate in a relatively small area, going for pulls located only a few hours to maybe a few days away from wherever they intend to sell the haul. However, the chaotic nature of the Belly makes it difficult to map out or predict travel with any real certainty.

Some scavenging companies skip the Problem or Scarcity and Potential Solution steps altogether, and simply wander around like nomads, looking for the best places to attempt a pull. In this case, be sure to give them ample opportunities to pursue what they wish, but only after they've overcome many obstacles.

## THE PULL ITSELF

This is generally the climax of the pull cycle. The scavengers have located their potential haul, traveled through hell to get there, and finally gotten set up and ready to dive in. This part can be relatively simple or incredibly complex and challenging, depending on the pull site itself, how the characters approach it, and what they're looking for.

A company that's trying to scavenge some heavy stones, to be used as building materials at a nearby stronghold, won't have too hard of a time finding the stones, chipping them off, or even lifting and carrying the haul away. They might meet a rival company along the path, or uncover some other problem amid their pull, but otherwise it is a pretty simple job.

On the other hand, a company looking for the fabled Scepter of Queen Bruhmjek should have a devil of a time locating it within her swallowed castle—tilted at a precarious angle, of course—and fighting their way through deranged wild hogs, reavers, or worse to get it.

Many strongholds, factions, and companies view certain pull sites as their territory and new scavenging groups as thieves. Some will demand tribute or a portion of the haul, generally at least half, but others will flat-out attack anyone they see who gets too close.

Often, the characters will have to *move stuff*. That's part of what they're good at, and what makes Specialties like Engineer especially useful. For example, the company might find a heavy stone granary that appears to be well sealed and likely to contain grain and other valuable resources. However, it's buried under a pile of rocks and old ruins, caked with gunk and Beast juice.

The company could try to break into the granary, if they could fit through all of the rubble and actually gain access to it, but if not they'd have to move the things piled atop it. This would be an excellent situation to use Scene Difficulty, allowing for the company to work together and pool their expertise, with plenty of room for error and danger—rocks falling, ropes snapping, a reaver ambush, and so on.

Eventually, the characters will either abandon the pull, or they'll retrieve what they're after. This is a momentous occasion and it should feel like a victory.

## TRAVEL FROM

There's two primary ways to handle returning the haul to the company's safe point. The first is to gloss over it quickly, perhaps make it a single Task, and move on to the next interesting bit in the narrative.

The second is to treat it with all of the same danger and difficulty of the Travel To Phase. How do they get back? How do they carry their haul? How do they avoid getting attacked by reavers or rival scavenger companies? To complicate this, they'll be weighted down and moving more slowly, their minds focused on protecting their wares, their hands literally full.

When deciding what's most appropriate, always defer to the narrative. Are they just a short distance away to the nearest safe stronghold? Or are they leagues and leagues away from even the closest semblance of safety, with roving packs of reavers and cannibals over every rib and artery?

The next best way to decide is to go with what the players want. If the pull itself was a massive ordeal that took a lot out of them—both the players’ mental fortitude and the characters’ physical endurance—then you can shorten up the trip back. However, if the pull went relatively smoothly, pour on some obstacles and complications on their return home.

## SOLVE AND BARTER

Finally, the company returns to a point of light in the endless dark guts. Here, they can solve whatever the original problem was, barter their goods, and take a break from the exhausting job of being a scavenger.

Sometimes, this phase can be just as dangerous as the rest of the pull (if not more so). The scavengers might return to a stronghold, hoping to sell their wares, only to find that it has been taken over by a hostile faction who demands the haul for free.

In general though, you’ll want to encourage the characters to seek out new pulls all the time. To do this, you’ll often want to make this part of the pull sticky—don’t give them *everything* that they want—but give them *something* beneficial.

At the end of this phase, talk with the group about the value of their haul and whether it contributes to an Advance. After a bit of rest, the pull cycle repeats and they’ll learn of a new problem.

# GIVING INSTINCT DICE

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Without Instinct Dice, the characters won't survive very long. They are competent mostly because of their Instinct Dice, not their Base Die and not their Advantage Dice. You're the one who decides how many ID the players get, so it is one of the main things you'll need to keep track of.

Remember, characters add earned ID to their Instinct pool in the Conclusion Phase of a Scene. Not before, not during, but at the Scene's end. They can still spend and earn ID during the Scene, but they don't gain the earned ID until the Conclusion Phase.

Each time a character acts instinctively, give them at least **3ID**. In any given Scene, a character should earn anywhere between 3 and 10ID, largely based on how difficult the Scene was and how many times they acted instinctively.

Generally, don't try to tune a Scene's pace or DST to how many ID the players have. They'll always have something to fall back on if they're really in trouble, such as fleeing or taking a narrative action. Eventually, they will learn what kinds of challenges they can and can't take on, as well as how many ID they'll typically need to hang on to "just in case."



However, if you do notice that your players are having issues overcoming most or all of the Tasks before them, check whether the players' Instinct pools are empty or full of unspent dice. Even remind them of the ways they can acquire ID, and try to bring in story elements that will encourage acting instinctively.

## OPTIONAL RULE: ID LIMIT

To amplify the fleeting nature of ID and the theme of oppressive scarcity within the Belly, you can set an upper limit on how many ID each character can store in their Instinct pool.

Discuss this rule with your group, and only move forward if everybody thinks it'll be fun. To be perfectly clear—it makes **Belly of the Beast** much more difficult and the characters more prone to suffering Consequences and Injuries (or even death).

A good limit to start with is **10ID**, but you can tailor the limit to your game. The higher the limit, the less it'll affect gameplay. A limit lower than 5ID is not recommended, as the characters would be very unlikely to survive any challenging Tasks or Scenes.

# OPTIONAL RULE: AUTO SUCCUMB

Rather than set a hard limit on ID characters can store, you can set an ID limit that represents a psychological or primal tipping point. If a character gains ID beyond this limit, they automatically succumb to one of their Instincts.

Succumbing can only happen during a Scene, so if a Scene concludes and a character gains enough ID to go over the limit, they'll succumb at an appropriate time during the next Scene, judged by their player and the GM.

For example, Katarod's group thinks an auto-succumb limit of 15ID is appropriate. Katarod acts Greedily, one of his Instincts, so he gets a few ID, bringing his total to 16ID at the end of the Scene. When his company makes it back to a stronghold, he goes to barter their haul.

The GM and Katarod's player think it'll be interesting if Katarod gets in an argument with the people he's negotiating with and he suddenly and unintentionally succumbs to Violence, his other Instinct, breaking out into a fight and badly injuring someone. Not only is he **Ashamed**, as normal, but his company is upset with him for creating a negative relationship with the stronghold and their potential buyers.

# DIFFICULTY SCALE

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Setting a Task's **Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold** is one of your main functions as the GM. Make every DST too hard, and your players will constantly suffer Consequences. Too low, and they'll breeze through everything, making the company feel like unstoppable heroes as opposed to narrowly surviving scavengers.

Briefly, the higher a Task's Difficulty, the more the characters will have to work to overcome it. The higher its Severity, the more their failures will hurt. And the higher its Threshold, the more resources and dice they'll need to expend to defeat it.

A Task has a **maximum** Difficulty of 5, Severity of 5, and Threshold of 5 (abbreviated D5/S5/T5). However, the overwhelming majority of Tasks have a Difficulty of 1, Severity of 1, and Threshold of 0.

You don't need to make Tasks with Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold in perfect lockstep—on the contrary, a great deal of fun and interest can be had with a D1/S4/T0 assassin or a D5/S1/T2 vault door.

Before anyone chooses to roll for a Task, always tell them its DST, so they know roughly what they're getting into. The scavengers would know this—they have extensive experience for having survived this long in the Belly.

A character's Approach can change a Task's DST, but you don't need to break down every detail and possibility. Just give the player a rough DST for the most direct path or for a particular Approach if they're asking about it. This helps to prevent their wasting too much ID.

The rest of this section further examines Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold from the GM's perspective.

# DIFFICULTY

Difficulty is how hard a Task is to overcome. Here's a rough breakdown of the Difficulties and their frequencies in a **Belly of the Beast** game:

| Difficulty                         | % of Tasks |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| 1: Common, easy, typical           | 50%        |
| 2: Average, requires effort        | 20%        |
| 3: Difficult, requires much effort | 15%        |
| 4: Rare and very challenging       | 10%        |
| 5: Incredibly hard and unlikely    | 5%         |

If you're not sure how to set a Task's Difficulty, it is a pretty safe bet to just go with D1. Keep in mind the difference between a Short and Long Task: failing a roll on a Long Task only prompts Complications, while failing the roll on a Short Task metes Consequences and maybe Injury.

# SEVERITY

Severity is how much failing the Task will hurt. The magnitude of Complications, Consequences, and Injuries depends on the Task's Severity, so be well aware of the ramifications of giving a Task too high or too low of Severity.

| Severity |                                   | % of Tasks |
|----------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| 1        | Threatening                       | 50%        |
| 2        | Dangerous and noteworthy          | 20%        |
| 3        | Potentially severe or even lethal | 15%        |
| 4        | Very dangerous—best to retreat    | 10%        |
| 5        | Probably instant death            | 5%         |

Again, it is completely fine to just give Severity 1 to half (or more) of the Tasks and Enemies the scavengers face. However, if you want to add some more bite and really put some fear into the players, higher Severity will do the trick.

If it makes sense, you can say that a player's rolled successes counteract the Task's Severity, the same way that defending against Enemy attacks works in combat. For example, a falling column of stone in some ancient ruins is threatening the entire company (with a Severity of 4). One of the characters decides to shove her comrades out of the way of the falling debris. She rolls 2 successes, which would normally be a failure, so everyone affected would suffer the full Injury 4. However, the GM thinks that because some characters got shoved out of the way, they should each only suffer Injury 2 (Severity 4 – 2 successes), while the character who shoved everyone, and *didn't* move out of the way, suffers the full Injury 4.

Remember, if you're using Scene Difficulty, **do not** multiply the Severity. Severity can never go above 5; however, the scale and magnitude of the Severity can change with the scale and magnitude of the Task or Scene.

## THRESHOLD

Not every Task needs a Threshold—in fact, the majority don't. Threshold is useful when a Task has multiple layers or parts, and one of those layers is especially resistant or ablative.

Threshold is a sort of antithesis to the dice, removing successes before you check for success. As such, a Task with D1/T1 is considerably more challenging than one with just D1.

| Threshold |                            | % of Tasks |
|-----------|----------------------------|------------|
| 1         | Resistant and tough        | 10%        |
| 2         | Well protected or stubborn | 5%         |
| 3         | Sturdy and ablative        | 3%         |
| 4         | Practically infallible     | 1.5%       |
| 5         | Nearly impossible          | 0.5%       |

Wait, but that doesn't add up to 100%! That's exactly right, only about 20% of Tasks should have any Threshold, and *very, very few* Tasks should have more than Threshold 3.





# CHANNELING INSTINCTS

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Curiosity, Fear, Greed, Loyalty, and Violence. These five Instincts define the characters' behaviors, what motivates them, and what drives them to dig through the belly of the Beast. Be aware of the characters' Instincts and encourage them to channel and act upon those Instincts as often as possible.

For example, Katarod has the Greed and Violence Instincts. As his GM, you should give him plenty of opportunities for Greed and Violence to come up. Put him into negotiations, give him opportunities to betray others for his own gain, throw battles at him, give him obstacles that would be easy to overcome by killing but would otherwise be challenging.

It can get a bit daunting to remember all of the characters' Instincts, so it helps to keep them in your notes. Rather than inventing specific circumstances that challenge or provoke the characters' Instincts, come up with interesting and gutwrenching situations that allow a multitude of approaches and Instincts. The players will move to meet the challenge and exemplify their characters' Instincts through the choices they make.

Gently remind the players of their characters' Instincts, asking them things like "What're your character's Instincts? Oh, Curiosity? How would they act with Curiosity in this scenario then?" Eventually, the players will become more comfortable thinking through the lens of their Instincts (the positive reinforcement of earning ID helps with this), so you won't need to pull it out of them so often or so blatantly.

But don't just spoon-feed the characters ways to act instinctively, either. Challenge their Instincts. Make them see the ramifications of acting on their Instincts rather than thinking things through, being patient, or compromising.

Make sure there's constant strain between the characters' primal, feral needs and the higher echelons of their psyche—honor, duty, ethics, and so on. Give them tough choices: acting instinctively might get them what they need right now, but if they do so, they'll likely make their situation worse down the road.

Sure, they can kill this merchant and take his wares, but now they're wanted by the stronghold and likely to be killed on sight. Of course they can hold on to their clannish loyalty to their kinfolk, fighting any strangers out of fear or misunderstanding—or they can try to set aside those differences and come to an amicable truce.

Ultimately, half of the fun in playing **Belly of the Beast** is seeing how far your character will go to sate their base needs, and how much they'll sacrifice to survive.



# CREATING NPCs

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One of the easiest ways to make a game exhilarating is to have memorable NPCs that feel like real, believable characters. There's no better window into a setting than its people, and the company of scavengers will be constantly engaging with others, whether nomadic tribesmen, fellow scavengers, cruel reavers, or bloodthirsty cannibals.

Defining NPCs with clear motivations, noteworthy characteristics, and a little complexity will give an *enormous* return on investment. If there is one thing you'll want to sit down and put some preparation and thought into before playing a game of **Belly of the Beast**, it's creating unique and flavorful NPCs.

Most NPCs that the company will come across won't be direct antagonists—at least not at the start. Swallowed survivors are hesitant to engage in violence without reason. To be perfectly clear—most are rational, self-preserving, careful individuals. They've made it this far, and they don't want to throw their lives away on

the off chance that they're not quite as quick or quite as ruthless as their enemy. Sure some will be immediately violent—some need to be (like cannibals)—but nearly everyone will be open to negotiation.

As the GM, you'll create most (if not all) of the NPCs. To keep things simple when creating one, you'll only need to remember four things:

1. Name
2. Who
3. What
4. Approach

## NAME

Names are important. They help to not only distinguish characters but also make them feel more real. An NPC named Brigol, well described and articulated, will be easier to remember than “that one guy with the limp.”

Come up with a list of names, a smattering of cultural variations, shortenings, and even random sounds. When you make an NPC—even when improvising one—write their name down. Remember, *everyone* (even a cannibal) is a breathing, thinking, motivated person. They have desires, fears, hopes, and a story.

## WHO

Just like a PC, an NPC has a Who. Who are they? What are they motivated by? What are their mannerisms? If nothing else, think of what drives the NPC—Instincts come in handy here—and write down one unique personality trait. That's generally enough to get you started; if the characters interact with them more often, you can further develop the NPC.

## WHAT

What's this NPC doing? What do they look like? What is their job or role? What is one distinct, memorable physical trait? Do they stink? Are they tall? Do they have three bronze teeth?

Generally, a word or two is enough for a basic NPC, but more significant characters can have a What that's as long as you can manage.

## APPROACH

How do they handle conflict? How do they interact with others? Are they deceitful, cowardly, brazen, cunning, combative? An NPC's Approach is especially important if they're hostile to the scavengers, as it can illustrate a lot about the NPC's personality and capabilities without their even interacting with the characters.

For example, an NPC leader bent on violence and driven by paranoia has an Approach entirely different from a nomad leader who takes the time to ensure everybody has enough to eat, speaks quietly and politely with passing groups, and doesn't immediately lash out at groups of scavengers or reavers.

## ASSIGNING NPC DIFFICULTIES

If you haven't yet, go read the **Combat and Enemies** section (page 101). After reading that advice, determining an NPC's DST should come intuitively after creating their Who, What, and Approach.

When making an NPC, think of the two or three most likely ways that the PCs will interact with them, and jot down a quick note about their potential DSTs. The shady trader at the stronghold isn't a fighter, but is an excellent negotiator. Therefore, her negotiation DST should be much higher than her not-getting-stabbed-to-death DST.

You don't need to go into a lot of depth, giving each NPC a full Who, What, Approach, and several DSTs. The vast majority of background characters and group extras will be nameless, statless blobs that exist only to add context and pad the numbers. You can give them D1/S1/T0.

If you're making an NPC likely to be hostile to the characters, think of their baseline DST, and make a note of one Approach the characters could take that would be highly effective, and one that could be disastrous. For example, a veteran hunter might have keen senses, so landing a sneak attack might be harder than fighting her fair and square.

You can also use an NPC's specific and abstract qualities to steer you toward an appropriate DST. A reaver's loyalty might be different from her bravery, even though both might be opposed by an Influence Task. Essentially, you can consider the NPC's Approach on as detailed a level as necessary or evocative.

# FLESHING OUT PULLS AND QUESTS

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When creating pulls, or more generally **quests**, it is often helpful to consider the motivations of everyone involved, what wrinkles can be layered into the narrative, and how the characters can make an impact. Think about *why* certain scarcities exist or *why* certain NPCs ask for the characters' help, grounding your narrative in the grim reality of the Evergut.



To give this concept some quick structure, try answering these questions:

1. What motivates the **source**? Where and how did they receive their information?
2. What motivates the **opponents**? What do they know, and how do they know it?
3. What motivates the **characters** to do this?

These questions will help you create a fulfilling, informed narrative and give the players an interesting, complex hook that prompts them to be proactive without forcing them through your predetermined plot. The players will need to understand the situation and feel motivated to pursue it—in other words, they'll need sufficient hooks to be proactive.

By answering these questions, you'll think about the relationships, the motives, and how the characters' involvement (or lack thereof) will change the situation in both the short- and long-term. This will inform your decisions and, when the players inevitably dig deeper, will help you to avoid unexpected improvisation and making flat, unmotivated NPCs.

# SOURCE, OPPONENTS, MOTIVATION

First, who is the company's **source** of information? Often an NPC, item, or piece of information will come to them, serving as the hook for the forthcoming story thread. Why is the source sharing this information with the company? What is the origin of *the source's* information?

Second, who are the scavengers' **opponents** in this quest? Sometimes it's simple, like a company competing for the same haul; other times, it might be an ally or clanmate who doesn't believe that the quest serves their interests. What do these opponents know about the quest, and what is their source of information?

Finally, what are the characters' **motivations** to partake in this quest? Are they driven by their Instincts? Do they feel they owe someone a favor? Is there a tangible reward involved? What are the immediate and future incentives?

# EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Katarod's company has finished trading their last haul at the stronghold of Nillox, and have been resting there for the last several sleeps. Hromb, Nillox's recognized leader (and the **source**), comes to the company and asks them to look for military weapons or raw materials, such as bronze ingots, that can be forged into tools of war.

In its simplest form, this request could be the scarcity or problem in a normal pull cycle, but asking questions about sources, motivations, and opponents will give the players some more context and texture with which to shape their actions. Hromb wants to send Katarod on this pull for two reasons (his **motivations**):

1. He distinctly dislikes Katarod and wants him out of the stronghold.
2. He fears that without these weapons, Nillox won't have the military might to fight off a direct attack.

Hromb claims that there is a sizeable amount of bronze in the nearby Web Ruins. This information came from another group of scavengers, led by a woman named Rolte, who traded in Nillox a couple of farrows ago. This is the origin of the source's information—something that the characters may or may not learn.

The **opponents** in this instance are easy: there are three groups who'd rather Katarod's company not supply Nillox with these weapons:

1. A group of reavers led by the frenzy-mad Viggot
2. A nomadic clan, the Chuben, who skirmish off and on with Nillox
3. The group of scavengers led by Rolte, who work the Web and want to stake it as their own

The reavers and the Chuben are both **motivated** to exert their force over the region, and Nillox will be all the more difficult to conquer if they have superior weaponry. Viggot is driven by battle-lust and greed, while the Chuben nomads are as afraid of Nillox as the stronghold is afraid of them.

Viggot has killed several other scavenging groups that have come through the Web recently, and so he **knows first-hand** about the bronze weapons in the area. Several Chuben herders have been killed by the reavers, their bodies bearing the marks of the new bronze weaponry, and so the still-living Chuben **know second-hand** that there is a new source of bronze in the area.

Rolte and her company started this whole mess, as they discovered the cache of bronze (**first-hand knowledge**) and keep returning to it in the hopes of selling more and more of it off. They don't want Katarod to get it, and Rolte views the site as her own.

Finally, we need to determine what motivates Katarod and his company. Katarod has the Greed and Violence Instincts, and so the GM would be wise to indulge those desires. Hromb, knowing Katarod well enough to know what the man values, offers to outfit him and his company with forged armor and weapons as payment. So not only does Katarod earn something of value that neither he nor anyone in his company can make, but he also gets a potent tool to mete out violence.

Hromb gets what he wants, Katarod gets a reward more valuable than keeping the raw bronze, and they both form a mutually beneficial partnership.

By answering these questions, the GM has painted a much more convoluted and locally deep scenario than simply “go and fetch us some bronze,” giving the players many more levers to toggle in the narrative.

## EXPANDING EVEN FURTHER

To really emphasize a quest, you can create a list of secrets, twists, or events that occur throughout it. Of course, you’ll want to add Consequences and Complications as the characters make a mess of things, but by coming up with some while planning a pull or quest, you’ll have more opportunities to create a deep story and give the scavengers hooks to hang their choices upon.

Don't make the twists cruel or unnecessarily obfuscating—they need to bolster the players' excitement about the quest and their interest in their characters' journey. And remember, writing down a twist doesn't mean you have to eventually use it. If it doesn't go with the players' preferences and the characters' actions, get rid of it.

For example, Katarod agrees to help Hromb for the promise of bronze breastplates for his company. Hromb will only be able to make the armor if Katarod gets the bronze and supplies it to their armorer. Here are some potential twists that complicate the scavengers' lives:

- The Chuben attack Nillox, making the territory a highly dangerous war zone
- Rolte races Katarod to the haul and tries to move as much of it as she can before he arrives
- Viggot and his reavers wait for Katarod's company to enter the ruins, and then start collapsing its vertical layers on top of them
- There actually isn't any bronze left—it is all in the possession of Rolte and Viggot
- The Chuben set up camp right outside of the Web, blocking Katarod's path to the pull site
- Viggot attempts to recruit Katarod, offering him weapons and spoils for helping to sack Nillox
- On their journey into the Web, the scavengers locate an interesting item that could be the source of another quest

What started out as a simple pull quickly expanded into a quest spanning multiple sessions with several overlapping layers and threads to be pursued.

## USING YOUR ANSWERS

By answering these questions, you'll help yourself to develop pulls and quests with consistency and depth, spark ideas for reactions and complications, add threads to future narratives, and give your NPCs realistic motivations.

Your answers will help drive play, drawing out thoughtful actions and unique approaches from the players. For example, if Katarod knows that Hromb absolutely hates him and his scavengers, perhaps he'll be less likely to help them. Perhaps he'll even seek out Viggot, offer a truce, and try to help the reavers sack the ungrateful hold.

## MACRO EVENTS

Keeping track of the company's impact on the Evergut can be challenging and complex; things get forgotten, changes get shifted, whole encounters don't matter. This can cause a dangerous break in immersion and verisimilitude for many players—half of the fun is in recognizing how their characters made a difference.

**Macro Events** are a way that GMs can better organize the narrative around the players' impact, the NPCs' reactions, and how it all weaves together into a more believable and dynamic story.

## MACRO EVENT STRUCTURE

Macro Events consist of:

- A **current state**
- One or more **connected events**
- One or more potential **future states**

### CURRENT STATE

The current state is whatever the looming *thing* is—how it changes the narrative, why it matters, what is happening right now. This is generally a sentence or two, something like *Viggot’s reavers prowl the wildlands around the Web Ruins*.

### CONNECTED EVENTS

The connected events are the large-scale actions that the scavengers can take: pulls, quests, or other large narrative arcs. These events are connected to the Macro Event and are usually a phrase or sentence, structured like the title of a pull or quest. Something like *attack Viggot’s keep, broker a truce between Chuben and Nillox*, or *disrupt the Reaver’s plans*.

The specifics of these connected events don’t need to be detailed in the Macro Event structure—that’s what the quest and pull structure is for. GMs, you *will* need to know roughly what these events mean, their repercussions, and how they might look to players, whether they’re hooks or leads or whatever.





## FUTURE STATES

The future states are the way that the current state might change, often culminating in some kind of noteworthy event driven by the characters' actions. Most of the time, a Macro Event will have two future states: one in which the characters failed (or did nothing), and one in which they succeeded (or made great change).

For example, with *Viggot's reavers*, one future state could be *Nillox lies in ashes* (if the characters fail), and the other could be *Viggot's reavers no longer threaten the Web*. This is a rudimentary example, but the same structure can be used to represent many levels of complexity and nuance.

## GOOD MACRO EVENTS

What makes a good Macro Event? Why not just make a simple flowchart or jot down a note?

That's perfectly fine, and simple Macro Events are pretty linear (like the example with Viggot's reavers). But the Macro Event structure is ideal for complex narratives. Start out thinking *big*. What are some big things that can happen in the Evergut?

- War or battle
- Loss of a stronghold
- Loss of a resource
- Exposure or discovery of a new pull site or resource
- Political upheaval

Any of this can make for great narrative arcs (even entire campaigns) and would slot nicely into a Macro Event. Simply think about: What triggers the event? What major events or scenes or arcs could impact it? What is the timeline? What might it look like at the end of that timeline?

Here's some advice on how to create a good Macro Event:

## HAVE A HOOK

The current state is the hook that encourages the scavengers to engage with the Macro Event. Make the event *interesting*, and the players will act.

## DRAW OUT YOUR CONNECTIONS

Get a piece of paper and literally draw out a mind map—a chart of associated thought bubbles—of what things might affect your Macro Event. These should be the seeds of your connected events.

Give each thought bubble a quick note about the people involved, what Scenes or Tasks might arise, and what the players might have to attempt or accomplish in order to consider the connected event “a success” or “a failure.”

### OUTLINE THE IMPACT

Circle each thought bubble with a connected event back to the main driving narrative. What would happen if *this* happened? What would happen if it *didn't* happen? Do that for each piece, and you'll end up informing your future state.

### MORE OPTIONS THAN NECESSARY

Don't fall into the trap of deciding everything beforehand. Provide *lots* of connected events (and therefore future states) that the players can enact. If you envision a Macro Event that needs one or two major connected events to happen, give the players six or eight or ten to play with.

In this way, the company retains an element of choice, and you'll keep an element of surprise. All the combinations of events the scavengers do or don't pursue, engender, or change creates a staggering number of potential future states.





## TYING IT TOGETHER

The whole point of Macro Events is that they let the GM organize their thoughts, the NPCs' actions, and the characters' actions. Start simple and small, but continue to add layers of complexity once you get used to the process. It's likely your first Macro Events will be much larger (or perhaps much smaller) than those you'll make once you've gotten a few under your belt.

Don't be afraid to change things around. Macro Events are GM-facing, so it's perfectly acceptable to rearrange some of the connected events, tweak a future state, or accommodate the players' ingenuity by adding new elements. However, don't do this to force the players down a predetermined path—this is often called railroading, and most people revile it or at least don't appreciate it.

A region might have multiple (or even many) Macro Events going on at once. For example, Nillox and the Web Ruins might have:

1. *Viggot's reavers prowl the Web*
2. *Tensions rise between Nillox and Chuben*
3. *The Web collapses catastrophically*
4. *Rolte's scavenger company claims ownership over the Web*

These are provocative *beginnings* to narrative arcs. Each can be handled in numerous ways, and each will change the state of the region—either escalating the tension (because the characters did nothing) or ameliorating it (because the characters did something).



# VII: Hungry God

The land was resplendent once: sprawling forests, massive ranges, glittering coastlines. Hundreds of clans, nations, and empires carved their homes from mountain and glen, living and killing and loving beneath the sun-kissed boughs.

But that was a lifetime ago. For generations the survivors have known nothing but sorrow. The Hungry God consumed all, leaving the world as little more than a skinned carcass moaning to be put out of its misery. Millions were swallowed during the Great Devourer's gluttonous feast; and yet, humanity pressed on.

Humankind has managed to survive in the Evergut, scraping a living from the squamous entrails of the Beast, salvaging what they can of the Eaten Age, and putting past fears and prejudices aside in order to ensure the future of their blood.



Yet every day is a challenge—and the Beast does not remain still. Its hunger is infinite, and its consumption constant. GMs, you can use certain events (be they random, player-driven, or narrative-driven) to affect the current status of the Belly and the types of obstacles the characters might face as a result.

## HUNGER

The single most significant element of the Beast is its **Hunger**. When the Beast gains Hunger, it resumes its never-ending feast upon the land. And when its Hunger is abated, it is content to sit for months or years slowly digesting through castles and mountains and forests.

A company's actions can greatly affect the Beast's Hunger. Any large-scale extractions, pulls, or movement of heavy quantities of debris that *prevent* the Beast from digesting it **increases** its Hunger. Breaking large pieces of debris loose and sending it deeper into the Beast **decreases** its Hunger.

For example, Katarod's company wants to accelerate the rate at which the Beast is consuming a particular region, as the influx of fresh trees and water is helpful to the scavengers. They go and make several large pulls, blocking up passageways and preventing much of the debris from traveling (slowly) down the digestive tract and deeper into the Belly. As it isn't gaining nutrients from its food, the Beast's Hunger increases.

Later, Katarod and his crew want to stop the Beast from eating anything until after they're picked through the best and freshest loot. They go deeper into the Belly and dislodge great quantities of rock, mud, and other waste so as to fill up the Beast's entrails with undigested food, making its Hunger decline and desire to eat stop.

## PAIN

While the Beast certainly doesn't feel pity or remorse, it can feel **Pain**. Despite many attempts, the Devourer can't be killed, or even seriously wounded. The united armies of a hundred kingdoms stood before it, unleashing their greatest weapons and technology—with hardly any effect. They were eaten along with the rest of their cities and the ground they stood upon.

However, the Swallowed know that the Beast can be hurt from within, and while the injuries aren't substantial or life-threatening to the gluttonous creature, they can change its behavior and cause it discomfort.

Scavengers can use this to their benefit, but more commonly reavers and violent strongholds will attempt to elicit a reaction from the Beast in order to endanger their enemies. The most common way is to simply hack, drill, and mine your way into its flesh.

The first few layers are easily scraped away, but after several feet the omnipotent creature's guts begin to heal so rapidly that all but the most dedicated organizations can hardly make a dent. Few and far between are instances when a hundred or more workers make a concerted effort to damage a segment of the Beast's innards, and often the boiling blood and terribly deteriorative fumes are enough to make the attempt not worth the effort.

Even such a small impact upon the Beast's health can cause a major reaction, forcing the Beast to roil and move violently, regurgitate great quantities of half-digested waste, or to feverishly consume certain elements such as cooling clay or saltwater.

Sometimes external events or large-scale random shifts within the Beast's bowels can cause it Pain—more than one semi-permanent stronghold has been dislodged in such a tumultuous location, disappearing into the black depths of the Belly's lowest regions.

In general, scavengers want to prevent the Beast from experiencing Pain, as it complicates their job. The more stable, calm, and happy the Insatiable Demon is, the more reliably they can extract valuable hauls.

# HAZARDS

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The Evergut is saturated in danger, ensuring that only the most cautious and careful scavengers survive more than their first attempted pull.

GMs, you can use the naturally violent innards of the Beast as a series of **Hazards**—environmental Tasks, Enemies, and Scenes combined into one nasty package. Rather than simply reacting to whatever the characters do or triggering off of Consequences, Hazards can be proactive (just like Enemies) and force the scavengers to defend themselves against the crushing doom within the Belly.

The most common Hazards are the Beast's **digestive systems**—various tentacles, acids, fluids, gases, slimes, mucks, and other inner musculature that causes scavengers to become stuck, encased, drowned, asphyxiated, stabbed, mashed, chewed, or otherwise killed. In general, *avoiding* a Hazard is the safest and surest way to get through it, which GMs can use to encourage careful and cautious play from the scavengers.

Just as likely, however, the GM is encouraged to place the most valuable, rarest, and lucrative hauls in locations replete with numerous Hazards. Not only does this engender fun risk and reward gameplay, but it makes perfect sense: the more dangerous an area is to reach, the less likely other scavengers have gotten to it yet—and the more likely there'll still be plenty of valuable loot left to plunder.

# ESCALATION

Hazards are constructed just like Enemies or other Tasks—with a DST befitting their narrative impact and difficulty. However, what makes Hazards unique is that they **escalate** when certain conditions aren't met. The more a Hazard escalates, the more dire things become for the scavengers caught within the Hazard's trap.

GMs can create Hazards in a series of **layers**, each either with a **countdown** or a **trigger** for what causes the escalation. A general Hazard will have two to three layers, a countdown of two rounds, and a trigger of rolling Consequences. Each time the countdown is depleted or the trigger occurs, the Hazard escalates to the next layer of difficulty.

Each layer is essentially a new Task or Enemy with its own DST, while the earlier layers' DST still remains. GMs using Scene Difficulty can instead increase the overall Difficulty, or have the earlier layers count as Threshold for the rest of the Scene.

If a character rolls more successes than necessary to overcome an earlier layer or element of the Hazard, these successes should carry forward to the next layers as well.

# HAZARDS IN PLAY

Katarod has decided to attempt to submerge himself in some aqueous and suspicious fluid in order to get through a harrowing pass. The fluid is in a dark recess of the Beast's body, but Katarod is willing to risk it to get to the other side.

Moving through this tract of fluid and undulating meat is a **Hazard**, with three layers, and a countdown of one round per layer (the GM has quickly decided upon this as the narrative demands).

The first layer is a Long Resolve Task with Difficulty 3, Severity 2 (Katarod has to hold his breath). He rolls, and gets 2 successes (bringing this particular layer of the Hazard to Difficulty 1). The GM describes how the sides begin to move and roil violently, and the acidic nature of the fluid begins to burn at Katarod's skin. Since he didn't overcome the Difficulty, he needs to roll another Resolve to defend himself against the Severity 2 attack.

Katarod rolls Resolve, and gets 1 success—suffering Injury 1 from the acid and the moving organs. That concludes the first round, and since Katarod has not fully completed the Long Task of the Hazard (he still has 1 Difficulty remaining on the first layer) the GM **escalates** the situation—springing the second layer of the Hazard.

The second and new layer is that the passage begins to seal up, pressing tightly on Katarod's body as he swims through it, crushing him and pressing more of the acidic juices against him. This is a new Long Might Task of Difficulty 2, Severity 2. This **stacks** with the former Long Resolve Task (now Difficulty 1). Katarod rolls his Resolve, getting 2 successes—enough to complete the first layer and get his head above water, and one of the successes carries forward into the next Might Task. He still has to see if he can push through the crushing flow of the tube or not—so rolls his Might (now against the Long Might Task of Difficulty 1).

He gets 0 successes, triggering Consequences. In this case, the GM sets the Consequence to immediately taking damage from this Task (Severity 2) as well as **escalating** to the third and final layer of the Hazard—a ring of bony outcroppings that begin gnashing and chomping down on the scavenger's body.

While his head is above water and isn't in danger of immediately drowning, he doesn't want to suffer more damage than he has to. He decides to **sacrifice** some of his equipment in order to lessen the blow—removing the incoming 2 Injury to only 1 Injury, bringing his total to Injury 2 (one from before, and one new Injury). He wedges a piece of his armor in the gullet, preventing himself from being totally crushed—but loses that armor from here on.

This third layer is treated like an enemy, with Difficulty 1 to defeat, Severity 1, Threshold 1 while still affected by the second layer of the Hazard. The third round starts, and Katarod rolls Might in an attempt to surpass the second squeezing layer of the Hazard—getting 4 successes. Not only is that enough to overcome the Difficulty 2 of the second layer, but also to carry forward and overcome the third and final layer of the Hazard.

With several plunging strikes, he stabs up into the fleshy tube and hacks at the bony outcropping, causing it to recoil away in pain as he pushes his way through. He emerges on the other side sizzling and bloody, with one fewer piece of armor, but alive.

# ENVIRONMENTS

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Scavengers aren't literally stuck within a stomach—at least not in the traditional sense of the organ. The Beast is simultaneously much more complex and much simpler than creatures of the surface realm, as it is utterly alien and incomprehensibly large.

The Swallowed don't *constantly* wade through knee deep stomach juices (although they certainly do at times), nor do they have to contend with semi-digested refuse and excrement. Instead, the Belly is full of bizarre and unique environments, many of which aren't impossible to imagine within the subterranean recesses or dense swamps of the Earth.



Below are some examples of different types of **hostile environments** the scavengers might find themselves within, what kind of mechanical modifiers they pose, and some ideas for Tasks the company might face.

## BONY CRAGS

A scrambled maze of jagged ridges, bone outcroppings, rough rocks, plaque-filled crystals, and tooth like protrusions have stacked atop one another to form a rocky, highlands-esque terrain. While drier than many regions of the Belly, these crags are a nightmare to walk through, twisting ankle, stabbing foot, and slicing those unlucky enough to trip and try to catch themselves.

Those learned in surface terrain equate these crags to the volcanic headlands before more volatile mountain ranges, or the high deserts found in the shadows of the highest peaks.

**Tasks:** Cunning to navigate, Might to climb, Coordination to remain surefooted, Resolve to ignore the pain and infection of a thousand cuts and scrapes, Lore to find food or water or a level resting place.

**Modifiers:** Any failed physical or combat Tasks which might result in the scavenger falling or hitting the ground should deal additional +Severity.

## MUTATED JUNGLES

Decades after the Beast began consuming the vast forests and woodlands of the realm, many species of trees, vines, shrubs, and ferns have adapted to live in small pockets within the harsh climate of the Belly. Such jungles are found most often in bioluminescent regions—typically ribward cracks in the Beastflesh.

Blood red, dark purple, and deep blue plants dominate these dense thickets, all groping and reaching for the best light source they can find. Many plants have become carnivorous, suckling off of the Beast's own blood, or those of unwary passersby.

**Tasks:** Stealth to go by undisturbed, Lore to avoid certain dangerous and poisonous plants, Cunning to navigate, Might to hack through the tangles, Resolve to stave off exhaustion and pollen-based poisons.

**Modifiers:** Moving through these jungles is much more difficult than a surface forest, as it actively (albeit slowly) attempts to ensnare and eat scavengers. It is much easier for enemies and predators to hide, so Awareness rolls should have higher Difficulty or Threshold.

## SINKHOLES

Massive gaping sinkholes litter the Evergut, many of which are over a league in diameter, and reach downward in unknown depths. Whether through natural inner workings of the Beast, or by some unknown calamitous injury it suffered, these sinkholes trap and collect enormous amounts of the surface world, and are ripe for scavenging hauls. Yet even the most bountiful are rarely worth the danger.

**Tasks:** Awareness to not accidentally fall off of the black precipice, Cunning to find a path down, Lore to set up temporary hanging camps, Coordination to rappel down, Might to climb back up, Resolve not to become stricken with Fear and panic.

**Modifiers:** These sinkholes are utterly dangerous, and falling into them (either through accident, improper descent, or being knocked into one during combat) will likely result in death, or at least a dangerous increase in Severity. They also act as natural amplifiers of sound, and can make climbing them with Stealth nearly impossible. Bringing large hauls back up with any measure of safety should have increased DST all around.

## CLAUSTROPHOBIC TUBES

While much of the Belly is a series of cavernous chambers and wide open expanses, other segments are densely packed walls and passages filled with millions of tubes. Many are the width of an arm or leg, but some are broad enough to walk through, while others force a scavenger to squish themselves flat in order to crawl through.

These tube-masses connect different chambers and organs to one another, and stand as difficult chokepoints to reach new territory for companies and strongholds alike. What's worse is that many of these writhe and undulate, sometimes even constricting in a spasm so tight that it can crush a hog into pulp.

**Tasks:** Awareness to find passages that are traversable, Coordination to squirm through tighter spaces, Resolve to remain calm and control breathing, Cunning to not become disoriented, Might to fight off crushing spasms.

**Modifiers:** It is all but impossible to cooperate, communicate, or fight in such confined spaces. More than one band of reavers has attacked a company that's lodged within these tube walls, shooting arrows and stabbing spears at the helpless scavengers. This makes any reactive Task or roll operate at Threshold (such as a Dodge or Block).

## SUNKEN CITY

The first cities to fall had little time to prepare—they were the richest, the most populated, the most elegant in their architecture. It was these metropolises that drew the Beast's hungry maw, and now lie buried under decades of layered deluge. The Belly's tumultuous nature can upheave these great urban centers, churning and spinning and mashing them as they are consumed.

Some of the greatest pull sites are these cities that have sunken beneath mounds of dirt and clay and stone, or sit amongst partially-healed Beastflesh, their secrets barely glimmering through the darkness. Many are practically invisible, but can be discovered by determined scavengers willing to descend deep enough.

**Tasks:** Lore to know about a particular city and its culture or wealth, Coordination to move carefully through the ruins without creating an avalanche, Might to climb and pick through the heavy rubble, Cunning to construct levers and pulleys and harnesses in order to move sufficient materials, Awareness to search for the greatest hauls and most lucrative neighborhoods.

**Modifiers:** Most of these cities have buildings which are largely intact, but stacked precariously atop one another, wedged between crevices, and stabilized with years of mud and refuse. This will increase the Severity of any dislodging of material, falls, or dropping items. They're incredibly difficult to navigate, and should reflect as such for Awareness or Cunning rolls.

## CREATING YOUR OWN

The Evergut is enormous—almost unimaginably huge. If you can imagine a climate, ecology, or subregion that could feasibly exist on Earth or in a cave, then it is feasible within the Belly.

You can start by applying a few basic principles to it, and work from there. Think of an Earth or surface-like environment and then twist it appropriately for the Evergut. Is it high and dry? Is it a rainforest? Is it a series of ponds and lakes? A swamp?

Then begin to analyze and answer these questions:

- How did this place come to be?
- Is it largely from the surface, or is it a naturally occurring phenomenon in the Evergut?
- How fresh or old is this place?
- Has it mutated from its surface form, and if so, how?
- What effect would an unlimited supply of water, energy, and alien hyper-effluence have on such an environment?
- What kind of people can and do live there?
- What kind of creatures can and do live there?

# ESCAPE

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There isn't a more unifying dream among the Swallowed than to escape the omnipresent confines of the Evergut. Children hear the stories of their ancestors living among the birds and the sun and the sea, dreaming and hoping that they too someday can see the beautiful and bountiful majesty of the surface.

Yet such is little more than fruitless hope, as proven by the countless Swallowed who have attempted to escape from the Beast's gullet. As far as anyone knows, not a single survivor has ever made it to the far tailward depths of the Beast—and many learned scholars tell stories that the creature never left any waste or refuse in its wake. Some believe that its bowels empty into Hell, and therefore “passing through” the Evergut would lead to an even more torturous existence.

Others have attempted to ascend headward, hoping to climb out of the Hungry God's throat and scramble through its massive, gnashing teeth. Whether any have ever made it, nobody is sure. There are tales of those who've succeeded, of course, but most think of them as idle myth and legend, little more than children's sleeptime stories. Hope can get a scavenger killed, who agree it's best to ignore such myths.

GMs, if your players want to make an active effort (or even an entire campaign) to escape the Belly, don't simply state that it is *impossible*. However, it is *extremely improbable*, as the Beast's sole function in its near-immortality is to keep things down and brewing. Remember that its anatomy doesn't match anything that we understand or adhere to on Earth, and doesn't have to eject refuse or breathe or do whatever else we think an animal should do. It is a literal alien evolved to consume entire planets—it can take whatever horrifying form you want.

If your group discusses this as part of the game concept phase (or it comes up organically as a desire for the characters mid-campaign), talk about it openly and freely. *Belly of the Beast* isn't really *designed* for characters to escape, but if that's what the players want to attempt to accomplish, there are plenty of pulls and quests they'd have to go on in order to do so (perhaps they can find a cache of gunpowder, or navigate through a portion of the Evergut that leads to the outside, or find an eaten library that is full of anatomical drawings of the Beast while the surface survivors still had time to study it, etc.)

But, really, in the end, it's likely that the scavengers will end up dead like the rest of their Swallowed brethren.





# Tables and Seeds

Roll 2d6 and read the results on the appropriate table below.

## SCARCITY

---

|     |                                            |
|-----|--------------------------------------------|
| 1 1 | All of the potable water has been spoiled  |
| 1 2 | The nearest water source dried up          |
| 1 3 | The crop yield is withered and dead        |
| 1 4 | The harvested crops are deadly poisonous   |
| 1 5 | All the nearby soil has soured with acid   |
| 1 6 | The Belly's movement destroyed the harvest |

|     |                                                          |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 1 | The hogs aren't producing milk                           |
| 2 2 | The hogs aren't producing young                          |
| 2 3 | The hogs are sick and feverish                           |
| 2 4 | The hogs are crazed and violent                          |
| 2 5 | The hogs' meat is deadly poisonous                       |
| 2 6 | A passel of hogs is missing                              |
| 3 1 | No stone or boulders can be found                        |
| 3 2 | The last of the textiles is rotted through               |
| 3 3 | The last of the glass and obsidian breaks                |
| 3 4 | The clay pits run dry and useless                        |
| 3 5 | The last of the metal is rusted or depleted              |
| 3 6 | The last of the leather is stitched and used             |
| 4 1 | Materials are needed for a new stronghold                |
| 4 2 | Large bones are needed for a fortification               |
| 4 3 | A flat and stable location is needed for a new structure |
| 4 4 | A leader demands real wood for a throne                  |
| 4 5 | A single, large flagstone for a foundation               |
| 4 6 | Metal hinges and nails for a stronghold gate             |
| 5 1 | An armload of spidervein mushrooms                       |
| 5 2 | A bushel of Beastblood-filled salamanders                |
| 5 3 | The tails of frenzy cats                                 |
| 5 4 | Crushed and purified bones of a cannibal                 |
| 5 5 | A pure copper ingot the size of a fist                   |
| 5 6 | Glassware, bottles, and containers                       |

|     |                                           |
|-----|-------------------------------------------|
| 6 1 | Bronze pure and large enough for weaponry |
| 6 2 | An iron anvil not ruined by rust          |
| 6 3 | Hardwood or charcoal for a forge          |
| 6 4 | Untainted steel of any size               |
| 6 5 | Metal pliers with an intact screw         |
| 6 6 | Sinews for bowstring                      |

# INTERESTING FINDS

|     |                                              |
|-----|----------------------------------------------|
| 1 1 | A masterfully carved stone sword's hilt      |
| 1 2 | A crude painting of someone a PC recognizes  |
| 1 3 | A watertight scroll case                     |
| 1 4 | Fragments of a highly detailed map           |
| 1 5 | A bloodstained bone box                      |
| 1 6 | Rolls of waxed vellum and an inkpot          |
| 2 1 | Dozens of perfect, head-sized marble spheres |
| 2 2 | An intricately carved jade comb              |
| 2 3 | A very well made wooden chest—empty          |
| 2 4 | A massive puddle of rusted iron, once melted |

|     |                                                    |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------|
| 2 5 | Masks that appear to be made of skin and hair      |
| 2 6 | A simple but well-made board game set              |
| 3 1 | Several hundred feet of empty stone pipes          |
| 3 2 | A sack full of fine powdered flour                 |
| 3 3 | A jug of excellent lantern oil                     |
| 3 4 | A delicious, expertly cooked pie—still warm        |
| 3 5 | A beautiful parrot chirping in a fine cage         |
| 3 6 | A satchel of sealed religious and historical texts |
| 4 1 | A length of rope made of a peculiar material       |
| 4 2 | Most of the components for a naval telescope       |
| 4 3 | A fistful of smooth, reflective, magnetic stones   |
| 4 4 | A small sewing kit with a few pieces missing       |
| 4 5 | A carved smoking pipe and pouch of tobacco         |
| 4 6 | A ring of various keys                             |
| 5 1 | A nearly ruined elegant blade bearing a sigil      |
| 5 2 | An intact chandelier holding fresh candles         |
| 5 3 | A graceful book written in a foreign language      |
| 5 4 | A tiny bottle of exceedingly sticky glue           |
| 5 5 | A human skull coated in shiny black lacquer        |
| 5 6 | An empty but refillable hourglass                  |
| 6 1 | Half of a warship in surprisingly good shape       |
| 6 2 | A horse's entire block, tackle, and bridle         |
| 6 3 | A palm-sized cube of metal that weighs 50 pounds   |
| 6 4 | A glass case of finely preserved insects           |

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|     |                                                   |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------|
| 6 5 | A small bottle filled with various types of seeds |
| 6 6 | A musical horn made of an unknown material        |

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# UNIQUE PEOPLE

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|     |                                                                                                                  |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 1 | Jorbah—massive, muscled, a self-proclaimed king, heavily tattooed and mouth full of bronze teeth                 |
| 1 2 | Nhev—a cheerful and humorous woman known to hum lewd tunes half to herself, one brown eye and one blue           |
| 1 3 | Vurk—seedy, slight, sinister, half a tongue, mumbles, long gray hair, infamous for his work with a knife         |
| 1 4 | Fallet—tall, hard, and beautiful were her nose not cut off, she intensely hates slavery (especially of children) |
| 1 5 | Gunthrel—doughy, old, feigns failing eyes and ears (but is actually quite sharp), highly pious and honorable     |
| 1 6 | Shahib—a wise and wily alchemist not above poisoning her enemies, with a pitch-perfect voice and bald head       |
| 2 1 | Mank—a cruel swineherd, booming laugh, fondness for mushrooms, known to own and abuse slaves                     |
| 2 2 | Guptin—young adult, the leader of her clan, a highly skilled diplomat and trader, intricate facial scarification |
| 2 3 | Hong—gangly, an impressive beard, large gap tooth, successful scavenger who's friendly to other companies        |
| 2 4 | Olba—a strong matron, stern but kind, limps, takes in dozens of orphans and raises them as her own clan          |

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|     |                                                                                                                  |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 5 | Harth—a one-armed, one-eyed former reaver turned weaponsmith, rarely speaks, cuts deals with scavengers          |
| 2 6 | Rahu—a young prodigy, genius, she has extensive knowledge of the Eaten Age's history, stutters, blue eyes        |
| 3 1 | Poff—a surgeon with a wheezy laugh, enormous eyebrows, and a taste for Beastblood whiskey                        |
| 3 2 | Yabriel—an impressively athletic woman, fabled warrior, apathetic and cold-hearted, renowned as a mercenary      |
| 3 3 | Vrex—a papery thin man with watery eyes and open sores, he emotionally preaches of the Beast's godly power       |
| 3 4 | Lam—a traveling merchant, witty, protected by her guard hogs, trades in secrets, a pot belly from a love of beer |
| 3 5 | Pungit—most of his flesh was burned by acid, incredible sense of smell, depressed, will help scavenge for barter |
| 3 6 | Shasar—the leader of a nomadic group of healers and surgeons, exceedingly humble, kind, and graceful             |
| 4 1 | Tonthik—an ancient, freakishly capable businessman, very wealthy, manipulative, family died in the Eaten Age     |
| 4 2 | Baoyu—a scavenger, mercenary, and hunter, dry sense of humor, surprisingly small, has a pet falcon she loves     |
| 4 3 | Gronn—has many wives and children that grow plants and trees in backpacks full of dirt, rotund, hairy, glares    |
| 4 4 | Yingeth—a brewer, innkeep, loves to gossip, always has dramatic stories to tell, widowed to a dead scavenger     |
| 4 5 | Howarm—a cowed and mysterious figure willing to trade rare artifacts for secrets and legends of haul locations   |
| 4 6 | Trutt—a bizarre woman (many would say insane) who has somehow tamed and rides a horse-sized hog                  |

|     |                                                                                                                         |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 1 | Xinglo—a fanatic wiseman who commits ritualistic sacrifice to the Beast, will pay well for intact human eyes            |
| 5 2 | Arwhax—an infamous slaver, brutal, sharpened fangs, her slave-army attacks other slave caravans and groups              |
| 5 3 | Quinn—a beautiful young man, full of wistful sorrow, is a tormented and talented sculptor who inspires many             |
| 5 4 | Nibb—a famously talented mason, she travels between strongholds to consult on construction, soft brown eyes             |
| 5 5 | Pao—a reaver who captures beasts and warriors to be forced into the fighting pits, cackling laugh, many piercings       |
| 5 6 | Tuliette—an austere woman, teaches math and reading to anyone, secretly loves dancing, used to be a cannibal            |
| 6 1 | Amit—a rude, passionate man, braided mustache, collector of spices, has a strong distaste for scavengers                |
| 6 2 | Gurhann—a queen, mother to many children, wife to many husbands, rules her stronghold with an iron fist                 |
| 6 3 | Lupong—a man with bright blue skin, can see despite blindness, said to be a sorcerer, speaks in bizarre riddles         |
| 6 4 | Bibitia—a huntress that specializes in tracking and traps, often travels with scavengers, shy, sweet, shares selflessly |
| 6 5 | Sestus—a learned warrior committed to bringing law to the Evergut, meting out judgment one sentence at a time           |
| 6 6 | Himna—a feral red-haired girl who poisons the unsuspecting with sleeping mushrooms in order to steal                    |



# QUICK CULTURE TABLE

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Roll 1d6 on each table below to mix and match a stronghold or nomadic groups' culture and traits.

## LEADERSHIP

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|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Hereditary chieftainism               |
| 2 | Employment / slavery                  |
| 3 | Warrior elite                         |
| 4 | Direct democracy                      |
| 5 | Council of elders / experts / shamans |
| 6 | Communal guidelines and bylaws        |

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# UNIQUE PHYSICAL TRAIT

|   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Facial scarification                 |
| 2 | Lifepath tattoos on arms and legs    |
| 3 | Smooth bald heads                    |
| 4 | Lack of irises in the eyes           |
| 5 | Six fingers on each hand             |
| 6 | Engraving and/or sharpening of teeth |

# UNIQUE CULTURAL TRAIT

|   |                                                   |
|---|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Always travel in pairs or even-numbered clusters  |
| 2 | Highly penitent, religious, prayerful             |
| 3 | Sing cultural myth-songs in groups                |
| 4 | Collect and keep items of a particular color      |
| 5 | Worship a now-extinct creature                    |
| 6 | Bizarre or singular diet (only meat, only butter) |

# UNIQUE FORM OF DRESS

|   |                                             |
|---|---------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Tightly wrapped layers and bands of leather |
| 2 | Loose, heavy, thick woolen ponchos          |
| 3 | Fabrics all dyed a single bright color      |
| 4 | Incorporation of bone and teeth into fabric |
| 5 | Scarves or wraps around head, neck, or face |
| 6 | Intricate bead-work in all textiles         |

# SCARCITY OR NEED

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| 1 | Food or water |
| 2 | Weapons       |
| 3 | Shelter       |
| 4 | Medicine      |
| 5 | Tools         |
| 6 | Barter        |

# UNIQUE RESOURCE

|   |                                             |
|---|---------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The formula and method for cured steel      |
| 2 | An extremely large and fertile hog          |
| 3 | High-potency alchemy from the Eaten Age     |
| 4 | Several sealed bolts of silk                |
| 5 | An abundance of tools and unique technology |
| 6 | Several potted fruit trees                  |

# APPROACH

|   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Cautious, defensive, distrusting     |
| 2 | Methodical, careful, suspicious      |
| 3 | Selfish, loyal, slow to trust        |
| 4 | Tactical, pragmatic, calculating     |
| 5 | Peaceful, amicable, trusting         |
| 6 | Aggressive, bloodthirsty, conquering |

# TERRITORY CONTROL

|   |                                               |
|---|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Highly nomadic with no consistent area        |
| 2 | Nomadic with broad cyclical patterns          |
| 3 | Semi-nomadic among a few locations            |
| 4 | Temporary strongholds until resources deplete |
| 5 | Several small strongholds cooperating         |
| 6 | One powerful and fortified stronghold         |

# Belly of the Beast

## Quick Start

Get together a group of two or more people with some dice, paper, and pencils (or digital equivalents). One person is the **Game Master (GM)**, who runs all of the **non-player characters (NPCs)**, describes the environment, and sets the Difficulty for various **Tasks**. Each other person plays one **character**.

This character is a Scavenger in the Evergut, personally compelled by their **Instincts** and a desperate need for supplies salvaged from the remains of the Eaten Age - the last of civilization swallowed by the Beast. Think *Mad Max* meets *Valhalla Rising* with a dash of the *Darkest Dungeons* video game.

First, define the nature of your **game concept** as a group - including the tone, the balance between **pulls** (scavenging runs) and combat, and the scale and scope of the narrative. It helps to assume the characters' **company** (team of scavengers) all know and trust each other already - even belonging to the same clan.

Then, each player makes a **character** that aligns with the game:

1. Come up with a **character concept**
2. Select two **Instincts**, and one of the available **Maneuvers** for each Instinct selected
  - a. **Curiosity**
    - i. Spend 1 ID to learn of something immediately useful and currently unknown in the Scene.
    - ii. Each ID spent to identify the reason of a particular occurrence, intent, attitude, place, or object is an automatic success.
  - b. **Fear**
    - i. Spend 1 ID to identify every potential danger in the current Scene.
    - ii. Each ID spent to retreat, evade, hide, or flee from something you fear is a success.
  - c. **Greed**
    - i. Spend 1 ID to discover the most valuable objects in a current Scene or place.

- ii. Each ID spent to haggle, sell, or get more profits out of salvage is an automatic success.

d. **Loyalty**

- i. Spend 1 ID to suffer a Complication, Consequence, or Injury in an ally's stead.
- ii. Each ID spent to complete a Scene Task is an automatic success.

e. **Violence**

- i. Spend 1 ID to learn an enemy's weakness, granting AD as appropriate.
  - ii. Each ID spent to ignore Injury, Complications, or Consequences during combat is an automatic success.
- f. Rank your **Skills** (Awareness, Coordination, Cunning, Influence, Lore, Might, Resolve, Stealth) in one of four ways:
- i. **Standard:** 1 Brilliant, 1 Capable, 5 Acceptable, 1 Rotten
  - ii. **Versatile:** 2 Capable, 6 Acceptable
  - iii. **Focused:** 1 Brilliant, 2 Capable, 3 Acceptable, 2 Rotten
  - iv. **Specialized:** 1 Brilliant, 3 Capable, 1 Acceptable, 3 Rotten
    - 1. Brilliant succeed on 3-6
    - 2. Capable succeed on 4-6
    - 3. Acceptable succeed on 5-6
    - 4. Rotten succeed on 6



- g. Write one **Talent**, a self-defined ability that gives +1AD to any relevant roll. (e.g., *Tracker* would give +1AD when tracking, while *Archer* would give +1AD while shooting bows).
- h. Select one **Specialty**, a role or area of expertise.
  - i. **Alchemist**
    - 1. Permission to attempt impossible alchemy
    - 2. Automatically succeed at simple alchemy
  - ii. **Bileborn**
    - 1. Permission to attempt impossible Resists
    - 2. Automatically succeed Resisting environments
  - iii. **Chirurgion**
    - 1. Permission to attempt impossible surgery
    - 2. Automatically succeed at basic first aid
  - iv. **Connections**
    - 1. Permission to roll Awareness or Influence to determine any local connections
    - 2. Automatically succeed at calling in favors

v. **Engineer**

1. Permission to attempt impossible engineering
2. Automatically succeed when creating simple tools, machines, and construction

vi. **Forager**

1. Permission to roll Cunning or Lore to find food and other useful bits
2. Automatically succeed at feeding yourself

vii. **Iron Lungs**

1. Permission to roll Resolve to hold breath indefinitely (a new roll every so often)
2. Automatically succeed at ignoring negative effects of fumes, gases, or smoke

viii. **Smith**

1. Permission to roll impossible crafting Tasks
2. Automatically succeed at basic craft Tasks

ix. **Tracker**

1. Permission to roll for impossible tracking
2. Automatically succeed at knowing distances, directions, and finding your way out

x. **Trader**

1. Permission to roll impossible negotiations
2. Automatically succeed at knowing business practices, values, and trading techniques
3. Characters **Advance** upon completing three successful pulls, each with a greater value. You can't Advance while you're **Ashamed**.  
Advancement grants:
  - a. Improve one Skill's Rank (Bad to Adequate)
  - b. Gain or improve one Talent
  - c. Choose to swap out a Specialty
  - d. Choose to swap out one or both Instincts

# GAMEPLAY

All difficult actions are called **Tasks**. Tasks have a **Difficulty** of 1 to 5. Multiple Tasks make up a **Scene**. Players only ever roll. Players roll a relevant **Skill** to overcome a Task. Rolls get 1d for free. Characters can add **Instinct Dice (ID)** to their roll if they wish. Once ID are spent, they are gone forever, and new ID must be earned. They can gain **Advantage Dice (AD)** if they are in advantageous situations or have beneficial weapons, tools, or info.

**Rolls = 1Base die + Instinct dice spent + Advantage dice**

Tasks are either a **Short Task**, which must be completed in one roll (e.g., jumping over a pit), or a **Long Task**, which can be completed over multiple rolls (e.g., building a hut). A Long Task's Difficulty is reduced by the number of successes a player rolls. For example: Katarod rolls 3 successes against a Difficulty 5 Task, making it a Difficulty 2 Task.

If a player rolls **fewer successes** than a Short Task's Difficulty, the character receives a **Consequence** or **Injury**. Consequences and Injuries are based off of the Task's **Severity** (which defaults to its Difficulty, but can vary as the GM desires). Whenever rolling **zero successes**, characters (and perhaps the company) suffer a Consequence or Injury equal to the Severity.

**Consequences** and Injuries can temporarily or permanently degrade a character's Skill (e.g., Capable to Acceptable), increase all or certain Tasks' Difficulty (e.g., physical Tasks receive +1 Difficulty), force a new Skill roll (e.g., roll Might) cause ID loss, or produce some other negative condition or effect. A Consequence can affect the character, the company, or the Task itself. A bad Consequence might be *the bridge collapses*; another might be *you cause the hogs to run in panic*.

**Injuries** directly affect the character and last for a number of weeks equal to its Severity. An Injury 3 might degrade the Might Skill by one Rank for three weeks after the Injury is healed.

If you gain a combined **Injury 5** or greater, you are **defeated** and can potentially **die**. Injuries take time to heal. A Lore (for surgery or curing sickness) or Resistance (for toughing through it) roll can expedite the process.

**Threshold** can be added to especially challenging Tasks. Threshold is how many of the character's successes are removed from their roll (e.g., a Task with Threshold 2 would make a character who rolled 2 Successes now have effectively rolled 0 Successes and trigger a Consequence).

**Enemies** function like Tasks, with a Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold. When Enemies attack, the character rolls a relevant Skill to **defend** (Might for blocking, Resistance for resisting poison or mental attacks, and Coordination or Awareness for dodging attacks, especially from bows and ranged weapons).

Characters must roll successes equal to the enemy's attack Severity in order to successfully defend. Rolling fewer successes causes the character to gain Injury equal to the **difference** between the successes and the attack's Severity (2 successes against a Severity 4 attack would cause Injury 2). If a character rolls no successes while defending, she suffers both an Injury **and** a Consequence.

A Scene can have a combined **Scene Difficulty**, which combines all of the Scene's Tasks and Enemies together into one easily trackable total.

Characters can choose to **Succumb** to one of their Instincts at any time, and this immediately concludes a Scene. The player temporarily loses control of the character, and the GM narrates how the character resolves the scene in a feral, basic way related to the Instinct. The character is now **Ashamed**. Inversely, characters can choose to **Transcend** one of their Instincts, resolving the Scene in a way that honors more civilized discourse. Once a character has Transcended an Instinct, it is no longer applicable for their character. Advancing restores a new Instinct.

You can't roll more than **10d** or spend more than **5ID** on a roll.

## INSTINCT AND INSTINCT DICE

ID are earned from **acting instinctively** - completing Tasks and actions in a way that demonstrates your basic impulses. Regardless of whether you succeed or fail, you gain ID based upon your actions and the purpose of those actions. In addition, as a Scavenger, you gain ID when you:

1. discover **clues** that lead to a valuable **haul**
2. successfully complete a **pull** (salvaging resources)
3. **barter** your haul successfully

ID are **earned** throughout a Scene, but aren't **gained** (and actually added to the **Instinct pool**) until the Scene's conclusion. At the end of each Scene, the GM and players should discuss which - if any - instinctive actions occurred that deserve ID.

As soon as ID are **spent**, such as when adding dice to a roll or activating an Instinct Maneuver or Specialty, they are removed from the character's available ID pool. These dice can't be used again, and new dice must be earned and gained.

Each instinctive action is worth around **3ID**, but especially minor or major instances can be worth more or less. Characters' Instinct pool will wax and wane, but at the beginning of any particularly dangerous Scene should have roughly 10ID at their disposal. By default, there is no upper limit on the number of ID in your pool.

Instinct Maneuvers can be used at any time, even if it is not the character's turn.

If a character has Transcended an Instinct, it is removed from their character sheet and they no longer gain ID when acting in a way that reflects this Instinct. They can acquire a new Instinct once they Advance, although the Instinct chosen must be narratively fitting and approved by the GM.

# BOTB REFERENCE SHEET

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**Setting:** the Evergut, Belly, or Swallowed Society. Roughly twelfth century Byzantine Empire swallowed by a worm the size of the Himalayas. Technology has regressed to stone or bronze age, people live in small strongholds or nomadic clans, and scavenge the refuse of their eaten civilization. There's no true magic, some alchemy and botany, and most people live off of hog bloodbutter.

**Characters:** the characters are **scavengers**, professional foragers and specialists who seek out the especially rare, valuable, or useful items from the many ruins stuck in various chambers of the Belly.

**Tasks:** any challenging action that's narratively significant.

- **Difficulty:** how many successes to overcome the Task (1-5)
- **Severity:** the level of punishment for failure (1-5)
- **Threshold:** optional, reduces incoming successes (1-4)



**Short Tasks:** only one character can attempt, only roll once.

- Fewer successes than Difficulty = Consequences and failure

**Long Tasks:** multiple characters can attempt, multiple rolls.

- Fewer successes than Difficulty = Complications or twists
- Difficulty is reduced by cumulative successes

**Scene Tasks:** large scale collection of multiple Tasks, multiple characters and multiple rolls are allowed (varies by Task)

- Each success in the Scene reduces the Scene Difficulty

**Rolls = 1Base die + Instinct dice + Advantage dice**

**Base die (BD):** the free, default die for any attempted roll

**Instinct dice (ID):** spend to add to a roll, earned by Instincts

**Advantage dice (AD):** circumstantial bonus dice

**Combat and Enemies:** Tasks. Successful attacks reduce **Difficulty**. Characters defend against the enemy's **Severity**.

**Consequences:** the repercussions of rolling zero successes, or fewer successes than a Short Task's Difficulty. These can affect the acting character, all characters, or the Scene in general.

**Injury:** apply a penalty to a relevant Skill or type of action. Gained through Consequences equal to the Task or Enemy's Severity, or the difference of a character's defend successes against an enemy's attack Severity.

**Spending ID:** Spend max 5 ID to add that number of dice to a roll. ID can be spent to activate Instinct Maneuvers. Players announce when they have done so.

**Nearly every roll will require expenditure of ID**

**Earning ID:** behave in accordance with one of your two Instincts. You earn these ID during the course of a Scene, but they are not added to your Instinct pool until the end of the scene. Players announce or clarify when and if their character has done so. GM approval and group discussion is encouraged at the end of a Scene.

The GM can say "Earn 3ID for each instinctive action your character committed during the Scene. If you're not sure, bring it up with the group," and allow the players to keep track.

**Gaining ID:** Any ID earned during the preceding Scene are now added to the Instinct pool. GMs announce when this occurs.

**Instincts:** each character has two Instincts that earn them ID and provide Instinct Maneuvers.

- Curiosity
- Greed
- Fear
- Loyalty
- Violence

# SPARK OF WAR

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## QUICKSTART PULL

**Nillox**, a stronghold friendly to the characters' company, was recently raided. The brutal attack left many dead, much of the hold in shambles, and the need for supplies and weapons at an all time high. The characters know of **The Web** - a nearby ruin of a massive city - but have to contend with others picking it over.

They hear from the survivors, including their leader **Hromb** (or an established NPC), that the attackers bore the sigils, markings, and weapons of the **Chuben**, a clan of nomads that has fought against and traded with Nillox for decades.

Any character that overcomes a Short Awareness or Lore Task **D2** will see that the method of attack, the specific targets, and the items stolen don't match with what they know about the **Chuben**.

# THE WEB RUINS

The once resplendent city of **Ingthop** was a bustling trade hub that connected half a dozen Empires with local clans and peoples. It was an epicenter of knowledge, engineering, and peaceful economic growth for nearly a century before being devoured.

Now it is lodged between a funnel-like crevice in the Evergut, many layers of stone and wood crammed and enmeshed like an insanely complex web, growing in density the farther down one goes. Because of its uniquely harrowing position, it has an abundance of profitable hauls waiting to be pulled by scavengers - but is exceedingly dangerous to traverse.

The city contains most of the essentials **Nillox** needs, including a largely intact **granary** that is in a highly contested region of the ruins. A company of scavengers led by **Rolte** - a careful woman known to employ stealth tactics - is likely to negotiate, sabotage, or otherwise interfere with the characters' efforts.

A pack of reavers led by **Viggot** - crazed and lusting off of Beastflesh - stalk the ruins in search of vulnerable scavengers. They've left a dead packhog laden with bronze weapons as **bait**.

The ruins themselves possess a number of hazards (each of which can be a **Scene D2** per scavenger), including falling debris, maintaining balance over delicately stacked platforms, avoiding slipping on aqueous grease from the Beast, and a fire that can quickly spread due to the abundance of pooled Beastfat.

# ROLTE'S COMPANY

Rolte is reasonable, and if the scavengers detect her or her fellows (an Awareness Long Task **D5**), she will negotiate with the characters for a share in their haul, or in the Web's territory overall. The characters may also wish to barter with any of her comrades - which possess some interesting trinkets (magnets, glass bottles, copper wire, silken rope, and some figurines).

**Rolte** is **D4 / S2 / T1** with armor against cutting weapons, and each of her fellow scavengers is a **D2 / S1** typical enemy. They will use Stealth and Tactics, giving them **+T1** if fighting as such.

# VIGGOT'S REAVERS

Viggot is sadistic, and while he doesn't mind sacrificing his own comrades, he will not personally engage in a fight he thinks he'll lose. He much prefers to use traps, bait, poison, and other nasty tactics to ensnare and torture his victims, leaving them alive but crippled.

It was in fact this pack of reavers that attacked **Nillox**, having masqueraded as the **Chuben** in order to spark conflict between the two groups. Viggot can be convinced or intimidated (an Influence Short Task D3) to back away from the scavengers or that they aren't worth the trouble - but will only speak to them if they meet on equal tactical footing or in mutual surprise.

**Viggot** is **D5 / S4 / T1** with stealth and cover, and will use a crossbow to great effect. Each of his reavers is a **D1 / S2** enemy.

## CHUBEN

If visiting the **Chuben**, the scavengers learn they suffered an attack, killing several of their warriors. They believe **Nillox** is to blame. If their leader **Yunaka** can be convinced (Scene Influence Task **D1** per scavenger), she and her warriors will help fight.